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SMASHING FIGHT NOVEL
by C. PAUL JACKS



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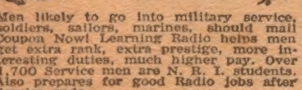
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12 SPORTS ACES

Vol. 7 May, 1943 No. 4

Published bi-monthly by Periodical House, Inc. Office of publication, 29 Worthington Street, Springfield, Mass. A. A. Wyn, President. Editorial and executive offices, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y. Entered as second-class matter June 29, 1938, at Post Office at Springfield, Mass., under the act of March 3, 1879. Title registration applied for at U. S. Patent Office. Manuscripts will be handled with care, but this magazine assumes no responsibility for their safety. For advertising rates, address Ace Fiction Group, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription, Sixty Cents; Single Copies, Ten Cents.



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SAY IT WITH HOMERS

Gripping Baseball Novelet

By DUANE YARNELL

Old Timer Matty Beal fought his way back to the big time league. But when he thought things were smooth he ran smack into a rookie nemesis who delighted in grinding veterans into diamond dust.

RED LEATHER DAY

Smashing Fight Novelet

By JOE ARCHIBALD

Al Morgan's brother was a top-notch battler and a headline hunter. And when he chased after the greatest headlines, it was up to Al to bring home the crown.

And Other Sport Thrillers in

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Now on the Stands

Spike That Man Out!



When manager Lou Bracker was shifted from the league leaders to a second division team, he was replaced by a busher without big-league savvy. But when he found that greenie manager had suddenly become a player-wise mastermind, Lou knew something screwy was fouling his come-back hopes.

Thrilling Baseball Novelet

By Joe Archibald



CHAPTER I

THE PITCHER wound up and threw another ball. Lou Bracker, at shortstop, kicked up dirt. Two were on for free and the man up there now was murder with a willow flail. Lou yelled half-hearted encouragement at the pitcher, wishing he had Lefty Boyle in there. But he had to forget Lefty, for the Blues' twenty-game winner of last year was not around and wouldn't be around for five or six years. Up in the stands they would be talking about Lefty. In the dugouts they were trying to forget him.

Lou glanced over at the Metro bench. If it hadn't been for conniving baseball politics, he would be over there now, di-

recting the best team in the world. Instead he was out here with the Boston Blues, a playing manager at the age of thirty-eight.

The count was three balls and no strikes on Rizzetti, the Metros' slugger. Rizzetti looked toward third base to get the hit or take sign. Lou Bracker grinned dryly. The Metro manager coaching at third had never been in the big leagues as a player. He had played eleven years in the Dixie Leagues, had never hit over .240. Yet there he was managing the world's champs. It pays to be related to a family that can buy controlling interest in a ball club.

The writers had laughed and railed at the selection of a manager to take the great Jim Carty's place. They reminded the owners that the job had been promised to Lou Bracker, the greatest shortstop the Metros ever had.

Rizzetti took it and Mace Brownell, the Blues' pitcher, slipped over a strike. The batter cut at the next pitch and drove it toward the left side of the bag. Lou Bracker threw himself at the ball. It smacked into his glove two inches from the ground. A Metro player was around third, never dreaming that the veteran shortstop had had a chance at the low drive. He dug back to third and slid in, but he was too late.

"Life begins at thirty-eight," Lou thought as he tucked his glove in his pocket and strolled in to the visitors' dugout. The cheers rolled out over the playing field and Lou touched the visor of his cap and grinned. The Metros' left fielder, who had been the owner, looked up at Lou and twisted his face.

"Horse shoes," he said. "You don't believe it yet, Bracker."

"Right, Georgie," Lou clipped. "I can't. You playing on this kind of a ball club. Other things—"

"Meanin'?"

Lou Bracker kept on walking to the dugout and left Seffler, the Metro player, stewing in his sweat. He washed out his mouth at the tank, then took his favorite spot on the bench and peered across the diamond at Sam Chipman, the Metros' manager. Lou chewed slowly on his gum, said to Thurneau, the lead-off man, "Get on, somehow. We need a couple runs, Spider."

Thurneau went up there and faced the Metro woman, Red Luffman. His last two times at bat had not even produced a loud foul. But the Spider could always average one for three. Chipman came out of the home dugout and waved. The right fielder moved closer to the foul line. Lou Bracker shook his head.

"I don't get it," someone said to him. "A mug like that comes up from the Southern Loop and he never even saw many big leaguers. Up to now, he's been handling these babies okay. They're out in front by four games."

"Yeah," Lou Bracker said and ground his back teeth against the gum. It had been hard to take. Ten years with the Metros and now he was with the Blues. A guy had to start thinking of the future at thirty-eight in the business of baseball. He had to get himself a manager's berth. Well, he had been offered one in Boston. Chipman had told him he could stay on as coach with the Metros when he had taken Carty's job.

"We couldn't get along, Chipman," Lou had said. "You know how bad I wanted the spot you're in."

Lou Bracker had met few men in his time he couldn't like. Chipman was one of them. There was something about the Metro pilot's makeup that was a little askew. Something you couldn't tag right on the button, but it was there just the same. Chipman had a long bony face with a pair of dark eyes planted a little too closely together.

THURNEAU, at last, caught one he liked and rifled it past first base. The Metro right fielder took it without moving out of his tracks. Chipman had called the turn on that one. Bracker could understand it if Chipman had retained Al Moss, the veteran player and coach. Al had been half the brains behind Jim Carty the last couple of years. But Al had gone to make room for George Seffler.

Lombard, the Blues' first baseman, hit Luffman's first pitch and handcuffed Chipman's third baseman. The ball

caromed off the hot corner guardian's shins and rolled to the stands. Lombard held up at second.

"Go out and murder it," Lou said to the third spot hitter, Stahl, and selected a bat himself. He had put himself fifth in the lineup and had been going pretty good. Mexler, the clean-up hitter, rode his bat between the dugout and the plate and watched Stahl draw a walk.

With the Blues' leading hitter up there, the Metro bench went to work on the visitors' first base coach. One caustic-tongued jockey pulled the veteran around with a particularly slurring thrust, and Stahl, taking a lead, swung his angry eyes the same way. Luffman threw to his first sacker and Stahl was out by a foot.

The Blues' coach started for the Metro bench and Stahl was on his heels. Lou Bracker tossed his bats away and went over there.

"Break it up!" Lou yelled. "Get back at first, Pete. You loused one up. Now—"

Chipman was grinning.

Lou Bracker walked away, trying to bring something out of the past. The new players in the business went back a long way to pull a trick out of the hat. There weren't many Mack and McGraw hadn't used.

Mexler took Luffman all the way, played out the string. With the count three and two, Mexler drove one between left and center and it rolled to the fence. Lombard scored. Mexler pulled up at third.

Lou Bracker took his stance at the plate and warmed to the hand he got from the New York fans. He watched the Metro infield come in a little. Seffler moved toward centerfield, took his stand with his back to a toothpaste ad.

The picture of the girl on the big sign reminded Lou of a girl with dark hair that fell to her shoulders. The last time he had seen her was outside a courtroom and her eyes were filled with tears. That was the first time he had dared to touch her. He moved out of the batter's box to shake the memory of that day out of his head.

Luffman watched Mexler taking a long lead off third. He toed the slab again, looked down at Lou Bracker and grinned. For years, Lou had saved many games behind Red, but that was all forgotten. Luffman had to stay on, too, and give everything he had.

Lou let the first one go by, turned to give Mexler a sign. But Chipman had flashed one himself before that pitch came in. The Metro catcher fired to third and Mexler went back to the bag on his stomach and ate a lot of dirt. The umpire called him safe and the crowd went wild. There was a huddle around the ump until the arbiter threatened to throw three men out of the game. Chipman called them off, said a few things to the umpire himself.

Luffman, a little unsteady, did not get enough break to his fast one, and Lou Bracker smashed it between short and second to bring in a tying run. Standing on first, he looked over at the Metro bench where Chipman was leaning forward watching his veteran pitcher.

Lou remembered things his old teammates had said when he had emptied his locker in the Metro clubhouse. Red Luffman himself had said, "It's a dirty break, Lou. Well, that punk won't last in this league. We won't do the managing for him, because we don't get paid to do it. Without Al Moss, he better study up on big leaguers at night. I'll give Chipman a year, Lou. Don't let them sign you to a long contract in Boston.

But Chipman seemed to have caught on for keeps. The Metros were beginning to look up to him as a born strategist. You had to hand it to a guy that could come right up from the minors and fill Jim Carty's shoes in a few weeks.

Corbin, the Blues' left fielder, popped a long one and the rally was nipped.

The game went into the eighth. Lou Bracker slammed one into the right field bleachers in the visitors' half to put the Blues into the lead. Brownell put the Metros down in order. There was but one more chance for the champs to pull the game out of the fire.

The Blues tried to add another run in their half of the ninth, but were checked after they had filled the bases.

Chipman had gambled on filling them to get at Lou Bracker's third sacker, Ottler. Ottler had hit into the double play, and the Metros came in with fire in their eyes.

BROWNELL got the first Metro hitter to lift a weak fly to the infield. Seffler came up and drew a walk. Lou Bracker yelled at Brownell, told him it was all over.

Chipman's catcher, Micky Rowe, belted one to short that the third sacker gobbled up. He threw to Lou and the manager pivoted to toss to Lombard, but Seffler came in and spilled him. Lou got up and dusted himself off, waved angry Blues away from him.

"Okay, Georgie," Lou said to Seffler. "I'll be waiting to return the compliment." He reached down and examined the spike wound under the rip in his pants. "You like to play rough, don't you, Seffler?"

"I get along," Seffler said.

"Yeah. That's what puzzles me."

"Look, pal," the Metro fielder said. "That's twice this afternoon you've shot your face off. Once more and I'll knock you into the stands."

"Let's see how it's done," Lou said, and threw his glove away. Lombard, Thurneau and Ottler moved in and Metro players came off the bench. Chipman came out and shoved Seffler away.

"Break it up," the umpire yelled and looked at his watch. "I'll give you just thirty seconds to get off the diamond, Chipman! You, too, Seffler!"

The game went on. The Blues dug in and threw back the Metro bid. Micky Howe tried to go home on a double by Rizzetti and was nailed at the plate. Another near riot flared and the fans in the seats knew that it was going to be a knock-down and drag-out for the rest of the year between Chipman and Bracker. Sure, you couldn't blame Lou for wanting to lick the Metros.

Brownell struck Chipman's second sacker out and the game was in for the Blues.

Lou Bracker felt tired under the shower. His legs ached a little and there was pain in the hip that Seffler had crashed into. A ballplayer is no stronger than his legs and legs don't carry a man much past thirty-five. If they did, men like Cobb and Speaker and Lajoie might still be around.

CHAPTER II

LOU BRACKER called Madge Talbot when he got to his hotel room in Boston. All the way from New York he had tried to tell himself to forget about it. She was Lefty's girl and you only had to look at her once to know she could never be lonesome. But he had promised Lefty Boyle to look after Madge. Big Brother Bracker. Nuts.

Her voice put more weakness in his legs when the operator made connections. "Oh, Lou, it's nice to hear you again," she said. "Two out of three against the Metros. That's nice."

"Yeah. How's the fashion artist?" Lou asked.

"Hungry," Madge said and laughed along the wire. "I wouldn't be a woman—"

"Seven o'clock," Lou Bracker said. "I'll stop for you."

She had a little apartment just off Newbury Street that was a beautiful setting for a girl with dark hair and dark eyes. The drapes and the rugs were pastel and the lamp bases at either end of the divan were the color of her lips. Lou felt sorrier for Lefty Boyle when he closed the door behind him.

"Rest your weary bones," Madge said after taking her hand away from his strong grip.

"You're not kidding," he said, and caught a glimpse of his face in a wall mirror. A face weather-beaten by a dozen tough campaigns. Crows' feet around the powder blue eyes and weariness around a wide mouth.

They went over to the Statler for dinner. There were a lot of officers in the dining room, carrying everything on their shoulders from gold bars to silver leaves.

Lou said, "When they look at me, they seem to ask me what I'm doing in mufti, Madge. I can't go around with a placard on my back saying Lou Bracker tried to get in. Nobody would believe I had something wrong with my eyes."

"Don't apologize," Madge said, and smiled at him, placed a hand on his sleeve. "It's all in your imagination."

"He picked a swell job for me, that Lefty," Lou said after the shrimp cocktail. He looked straight into Madge Talbot's eyes, shook his head sadly.

"He couldn't have picked a nicer guy, Lou."

"Yeah. He said to watch out for you because there's so many wolves around. So he picks one too old to bite."

"That's silly," Madge said.

Three officers went by and Lou heard one say, "That's Lou Bracker." He swung his head toward the voice and a lieutenant came over and grinned at him. "Hello, Lou. How will the Blues finish?"

"Up there," Lou said, and felt great.

"Good luck, Lou."

"See," Madge said. "Lou, baseball has to go on. It's our national game and the soldiers and sailors want to listen to it and to read about it. It's part of their lives. When they're way out there, they forget a lot of the war when they tune in."

"You've got something there, kid." Lou Bracker sampled the pot roast with his fork.

"I'd like to talk about that again," Madge said. "I know you don't like it, but I must. Lefty up there—"

"I'll see him next week," Lou said. "We're playing an exhibition there. They've made an exception to the rule that there wouldn't be any exhibition games. A lot of State officials will be there to buy war bonds. In a big way. Some guys will tell the prisoners how to help in the war effort."

"I've thought a lot since I saw you last," the girl said. "About Charlie Kriger. I've been friendly with his niece for a long time, Lou. I was talking to her about her uncle only last night."

CHARLIE KRIGER had been one of the greatest catchers in the history of organized baseball. He had been a keen student of the game, had carried more inside dope on ball players inside his head than you found in the record books. Kriger had been a stormy petrel and hard to handle. He had liked his nips and his games of chance and an occasional brawl on or off the diamond. He had played with five major clubs and had never hit under .300.

Charlie Kriger was dead. Lefty Boyle was up the river doing from five to ten because the State proved to a jury that he had washed Charlie up. The D. A. had produced evidence that Lefty had been heavily in debt to Kriger.

"We know he's up there as a victim," Lou said. "We know Lefty wouldn't have hurt a flea, but the case was against him, Madge. The dough he said he paid Charlie when he went to see him, wasn't in Charlie's pockets when—"

"No," Madge said. "They said Kriger carried inside information on the ability of a thousand ballplayers inside his head. He used to go to taverns and bet on the games that came over the radio. He made more money gambling than he ever made in baseball, Lou. He'd bet a man about a certain pitch, whether a batter would take a three and one or leave it alone. He'd bet a hundred dollars that a man would hit to a certain field I wonder, sometimes, Lou, if they were right about his marvelous memory. A man that drank like Kriger—"

"Ripley drew him up," Lou said. "He was a famous character, Madge, even though he wasn't an inspiration to the kids coming up. I remember he won a thousand by betting that a certain guy on the Bucs would hit into a double play. They say he was the smartest poker player in the business."

"Yes, Lefty can tell us that," Madge said and toyed with the food on her plate. "I've got a big hunch, Lou."

"Such as?"

"Ruthie told me her uncle was always scribbling notes. She used to go to his place and clean it up, and one day she threw some stuff away. She thought for a while that Kriger was going to throw her right out of the window. The next day he left for Chicago and was gone for a week."

"I still don't get it," Lou said and rubbed the sore spot that Seffler had left on his hip.

"I don't exactly," Madge said. "But remember what Lefty said at the trial? He paid Kriger five hundred dollars in cash. The place was a mess when the police got there. The D. A told the jury that Lefty had had quite a time looking for the slips of paper Kriger held against him, after he knocked Charlie against the radiator. They said Lefty went out of there with his five hundred. But they never found that money, Lou."

"That's right. Lefty Boyle had no time to cover up. They got him out of bed early in the morning and they told him he'd killed Kriger. They wanted his story, got it, and laughed at him. He was a gambling fool, Madge. It was Lefty's only weakness."

A shadow fell across the girl's face.

"I mean outside of another weakness that any guy can understand," Lou added. "You."

"Please, Lou."

"It's a rotten break, kid. Five to ten you have to wait. It's like you got the same sentence," Lou said and pushed his dessert away from him. It had gone sour.

"Somebody must have seen Kriger after Lefty went out," Madge said and twisted a little lacy handkerchief between her fingers.

"It's no use," Lou said. "It's done and you've got to put it out of your mind. Start now, so that when he comes out, it will be only a bad dream."

"The boy at the switchboard saw Lefty leave, Lou. He didn't see anybody else go out. That is easy to explain. If Lefty had really done that, he would have gone out through the basement. Doors are generally locked from inside. The boy said anybody could easily go down in the basement and go out through the furnace room."

"Forget it," Lou said. "It's all over, kid. Be thankful you've got youth left. You and Lefty. When you start over again, you'll both be only about—"

Madge Talbot tightened her pretty mouth and dropped her head. Lou reached across the table and lifted her chin up. There were tears showing through the smile she gave him.

"Yeah, kid. I'd do ten years if— Waiter, the check, please."

Lou Bracker saw her home and then walked all the way to his hotel. Your brain works fast when you use your feet. You can do a lot of healthy thinking with the clear air pouring the oxygen in your blood.

THE BLUES opened a series with the Phils at the Back Bay park, and Lou Bracker yanked himself out of there after the fifth inning of the first game. He had booted two easy tries, had struck out once and had rolled into an easy double play. He wasn't right. There was too much on his mind, Madge Talbot and Lefty. Mostly Madge. He had gone through thirty-eight years without getting bitten by the lady bug. Arnica couldn't do a thing against that kind of a bite.

Sitting on the bench, watching his replacement, Whitey Smith, play the shortstop spot, Lou caught himself hoping that Lefty had been guilty. In love and war you ask for no quarter. They wouldn't take him in the war so there was only the other fight. He spat his thoughts into the dirt in front of the dugout and signalled to the pitcher to walk the Philly batter.

The Blues took the series and climbed to sixth place. Lou dared hope that they'd never slip back again.

The Zebras were practicing when the Boston Blues trotted out to the diamond up at Ossining. Notables from Washington and all over the Eastern Seaboard were in the small stands. Lou Bracker heard that almost a million dollars' worth of war bonds had been sold.

Lefty Boyle was warming up and the band was playing *God Bless America*. Lefty paused in the middle of a long windup and grinned briefly at Lou. He stuck out his hand.

"You look good, Lou," Lefty said, a lot of the bronze gone from his skin. "Pretty soon they'll play the *Star Spangled Banner*. The land of the free—and the home of the brave. It still sounds nice to me."

"That's the kind of talk, Lefty," Lou said. "Everything's going to be okay.

Madge says to give you the same as always."

"Yeah, I been thinkin' of you with her, Lou. Not too much, now. You got an appeal about you with that gray hair beginning to sprout over your ears."

Lou Bracker's grin faded. He was going to tie into the pitcher when a couple of newspaper men came up. They wanted pictures of the Blues manager and the warden.

"An' me?" Lefty Boyle sneered and walked away.

The game started after the National Anthem was played. Lou Bracker crouched near the visitors' bench and watched Lefty Boyle open it by striking out Spider Thurneau. He watched him work on Lombard and force him to pop to the Zebra catcher. It was sweet to watch a real artisan work at his trade. It was heartbreaking to think he was penned up in the big house where his talents were going to waste.

Stahl couldn't do a thing with Lefty and the Blues went out on the field. A lot of boos came from the stands and the Zebra jockeys got to work. Guards were everywhere, eyes wandering, and Lou looked up at the gun towers and pressed his lips hard together.

Yount worked for the Blues. Two Zebras got on in their half, but died when the big league hurler bore down. The game went on into the seventh before a run was scored. Lefty Boyle had struck out seven Blues and had allowed three hits until Mexler poled a home run almost out of the prison into the Hudson.

"Let me go after that ball," Lefty yelled. Lou couldn't laugh with the others.

The Zebra infield collapsed behind Lefty. Three errors loaded them up and Kurst, the Blue catcher, scratched a hit past third to score two runs. In the eighth, the prison team got to Yount for enough to tie it up.

LOU BRACKER, with the Blues up for the first half of the ninth, watched Lefty throw his fireball past Lombard and Stahl. The long portsider never looked better. Mexler came up again and got his second hit. He went all the way to third when the Zebra shortstop threw high over first base. Lefty Boyle grinned at Lou when the Blue manager came up for his cut.

"Nice support," Lefty called down the line. "Like them lawyers give me, Lou."

Lou swung at one he couldn't see and got a piece of the ball on the end of his bat. It was a grass cutter toward first and the Zebra first baseman did not come up with it. Mexler scored. The game ended that way. Lefty Boyle had struck out eleven big leaguers and had given up four hits. His pitching would have been a near-shutout with even half a ball club behind him.

Lou Bracker had a talk with Lefty in the warden's office after the game. He said, "You'll be out in a couple of years, pal. You'll still be young. You can keep that arm limbered up here. Keep pitching—"

"Call me by number in here," Lefty Boyle said bitterly. "Look, Lou, I want to get out like a little animal you see in a cage in any zoo. Not to pitch against a lot of jerks in monkey suits. Look up there—listen to it. A plane, Lou. There's a war on and I'm cooped up here. It'll be over when I get out.

"Sure, I got a nasty break, but that don't say I don't want to be up there in a dive bomber or a P-40. I want to pitch against those Japs, Lou. Against the lousy Nazis. Nuts to wishing for baseball again.

"I never laid a hand on Charlie Kriger. I took the five C's to him and paid him off. He was going to turn the paper stuff over to me the next morning. He had them locked up in his office. His word was good enough for me."

"Take it easy," Lou said. "You get some screwy deals sometime, Lefty. You got to play them the way they fall."

Lefty Boyle turned away from the window for the bomber was out of sight. The hunger in the young convict's eyes tore at Lou Bracker's leathery heart. Lefty suddenly grinned.

"Tell Spider to send me that twenty bucks. I bet him I'd whiff ten of you babies."

Lou Bracker said, "Still gambling,

Lefty? It's in your blood. A rap like this don't cure you." A lot of pity for the pitcher seeped out of him.

"Sure, life's a gamble, Lou. I want to gamble my hide with a Jap's. I gamble when I tell you to stick close to Madge. What are the odds there, Lou?"

"Drop that," Lou said. "Keep her name out of this, Lefty. I wish there was something I could do to help you."

"I know all the answers, Lou. You think a swell kid like Madge will take the veil for five years? Look, I'm famous up here. The warden's daughter is a nice number and I drive her around a lot. I'm a trusty, Lou. They don't treat me like the murderer the D. A. said I was."

Lou Bracker felt like throwing his knuckles into Lefty Boyle's face. He looked far ahead to the day when Lefty would get his release. The vision put a bad taste on his tongue. Going away from there, he wished for a while that they'd given Lefty Boyle the limit. He had to go back and tell the girl a lot of lies about Lefty taking it like a soldier and how much he looked forward to seeing her again. He was glad when he reached the railroad station in the prison town.

CHAPTER III

THE METROS came into Boston three weeks later, riding ahead of the rest of the league by three games, and grimly determined to add to their lead at the expense of Lou Bracker's second division club. The jockeys of both teams had sharpened their spurs and were ready to sink them deep. The fans knew that when the Blues and Metros played, blood ran hot. The Back Bay park had twenty-four thousand people in it when the umpire called to the first Metro batter to get up there and hit.

The Blues' infield talked it up to Mace Brownell, who generally pitched the first game of a series against the Gothamites. Lou Bracker said:

"Let's go there, guys. These are the Phillies with New York suits on."

Seffler, leading off, looked at two of Brownell's offerings and the ump called both against him. He turned, said something to O'Rourke; the ump turned his back and got out a new ball.

"He's got nerves," Lou yelled in. "This is the day he gets horse-collared, Brownie. Toss it up to him slow with canapes around it."

Seffler took a vicious swing and then threw his bat away. Walking to the bench, he looked out at short and yelled something at the Blues' pilot. The fans up in the high seats could see the redness at Seffler's neck.

Brownell got rid of Rowe, the Metro backstop, by forcing him to hit a can of corn to Thurneau. Parker, the visitors' left fielder, beat one into the dirt. It rolled lazily between the third base line and the pitcher's mound. He beat Brownell's throw to first and the Boston crowd started yelling. Rizzetti threw two bats away and swung a big club as if it had been an orchestra leader's baton.

"Pitch to him," Lou said.

Brownell worked the corners carefully, but couldn't get the third good one over. The slugger trotted to first. Lou Bracker and Ottler came in to talk to the pitcher. McGurn, the next Metro batter, was belting the ball at a .389 clip. They talked to Brownell about the battle of Midway there on the mound until the ump told them to break it up.

Steadied a little, Brownell worked a three and two count on McGurn. He pulled the string on the next one and McGurn timed it nicely. The ball sailed to left field, but Corbin was running with the crack of the bat and he took it over his shoulder not far from the barrier.

Chipman had Tresky, a young right-hander, working in the box. Tresky looked over at the bench after every pitch. His manager masterminded him into whiffing Thurneau on four pitched balls. Lou Bracker bit down hard on his gum and put furrows in his browned forehead.

Lombard went down in the dust from a sizzler close to his head and Tresky grinned. Lombard had been hit four years back and had spent ten days in a hospital. Tresky fired another close one and Lombard fell away from it. The Blues' first baseman yelled something at Tresky and the war was on.

Tresky slipped a curve past Lombard that cut the outside corner. His next offering was a ball and he looked over at Chipman before he picked up the rosin bag.

Lou signalled to Lombard to belt the next one if it was good. It was good and Lombard rifled it into short right for a single. Seffler tried to throw it before he had it and Lombard set sail for second.

Stahl couldn't do anything with Tresky save trickle a slow one down the first base line. But Lombard reached third. Lou Bracker went into the hitter's slot while Mexler took his cut.

Astride his big brown bat, Lou looked over at Chipman, then turned his head toward third and dug a knuckle into his right eye. Lombard cut down his lead off third and Tresky's fast pitch stayed in the catcher's glove. It was a ball.

"Work the string out, keed," Lou said to Mexler.

Tresky worked carefully on the Blues' leading slugger. He put a seventh pitch high and inside and Mexler powdered it through the box for a single. Lombard strolled in and grinned at his manager.

The jockeys in the Metro dugout laced it into Lou Bracker. They called him "cry baby." They wanted to know how he was getting along, stealing a certain dame while her boy friend was away. They told him he was where he belonged. His old pals kept still, but Chipman had seven new players he had tied around his thumb. It was baseball, this jockeying. You tried everything to get a guy off stride. Lou Bracker lifted a long fly to center and the Blues went out to protect a slim early lead.

Tension kept building up. Seffler, passing Lou Bracker on his way to the outfield at the end of the sixth, cracked, "Look out for me if I get on, pal. I'll be coming in like a Heinkel bomber."

"And I'll knock you out for a row of horse collars," Lou countered. "They say a Spit can lick a Heinkel any day. Maybe I'll put one in your eye, loud-mouth." It looked like a tangle right there and the Blue infield scrambled around Lou Bracker and talked him down.

BROWNELL took his lead into the seventh and was going great guns in the first half. He struck out Chipman's keystone man, then followed up by setting Tresky down on four pitched balls.

The Metros were steaming and not because of the heat. The Hub fans were pouring it on and they got into their heads that the umps were giving them the worst of it. The Metros hated to lose, especially with the whitewash pail turned down over their heads.

"Three out," Lou yelled when Seffler came up. Seffler kicked up dirt and took a toe hold. He swung himself off his feet at Brownell's tease ball and the whole park rocked with laughter.

"Show him the ball." Spider Thurneau yelped. "He doesn't believe you threw it, Brownie."

Seffler looked at two bad ones, then swung at a curve. The ball popped high into the air, came down into Kurst's big mitt. Seffler fired his bat at the Metro dugout and nearly brained the batboy. Chipman shook a finger at him and Seffler opened his mouth wide and told the pilot off. Lou Bracker watched the rhubarb until Chipman turned his back on Seffler and disappeared into the dugout.

The Blues tried to add to the one run lead, but Tresky bore down and put them out in order. Hard luck hit the Blues in the next frame. A drive off Rizzetti's bat hit Ottler on the knee and put him out.

Lou called in a young player just up from the Sally league to take over the hot corner. The kid was nervous and bobbled one that came to him off McGurn's bat. There were two on and nobody out. The Metros came to life and set up a hue and cry in the dugout.

"Pitch it, Brownie," Lou called out. "That Whitelaw couldn't hit a cow with a snow-shovel. Double play ball, Brownie." He trotted in and told the pitcher what kind of pitch he really wanted him to feed the Metro third baseman. Inside and not too high.

Whitelaw drilled one into the stands that was only a foot foul and the Boston fans had a fright. Brownell took his time and worked carefully. He got two strikes and two balls on Whitelaw and

then put one just where Lou wanted it.

Whitelaw swung and the ball zipped straight for Lou Bracker. He tossed it to Thurneau. Thurneau in turn rifled to Lombard. Rizzetti kept on going around third, and Lombard's peg to the plate completed a triple play.

Rizzetti threw a punch at Kurst and Kurst ducked and whanged Rizzetti on the ear with his big glove. Chipman and seven players poured off the bench. Lou Bracker ran in and shoved the Metro manager away from little Thurneau.

"Pick somebody your size, mister," Lou said and Chipman backed away, his eyes stormy.

The umps chased Kurst out before order was restored. Lou Bracker called on an old veteran backstop from the Junior Loop to get the harness on. Bill Howley had been in the minors for five years, but the war had brought him back.

The Blues got two on with only one out in their half of the eighth, but Lou Bracker, himself, ended the rally with a long fly to Seffler. The Boston crowd squirmed in their seats and wondered if the one run on the scoreboard would stand up. The weak end of the Metro batting order was up. Reade first and then Tresky. But Chipman would throw a pinch-hitter in.

Mace Brownell rubbed his moist brow with his sleeve and bent his head forward to get Howley's signals. The Blues were chattering like chipmunks; it was like a bunch of kids whistling going by a graveyard. These Metros were famous for wrecking many a game in their last turn at bat.

Reade cut at Brownell's first pitch and Lombard made a miraculous stop ten feet inside the bag. Brownell ran over to cover. He took Lombard's quick toss over his shoulder while running at full speed. It was the fielding gem of the tight ball game.

CHIPMAN sent a powerful utility fielder up to hit for Tresky and ordered activity in the bullpen. Moose Jackman had been the leading slugger of the International League for two straight years. Brownell worked on him carefully and worked the count to two strikes, one ball. The Moose swung at the next pitch and fouled it behind third to the utility man, Flack.

That brought up Seffler. His average was .241 at the moment, and Lou Bracker eased up and grinned over at Thurneau. "We're in, kid."

But every hitter in any lineup is a potential wrecker of a ball game. Seffler worked the count even, then belted a low outside pitch between Lombard and Thurneau. Standing on first, Seffler looked over at shortstop. Lou Bracker knew what was coming if there was going to be a force play at second. He got set for it. Mickey Rowe liked to hit them to the left side. A pull hitter.

Brownell threw to Lombard to hold Seffler on. He pitched and the ump called it a ball. He tried for Seffler again, but the base runner got back. His second pitch was belted viciously toward the right side and Thurneau had to scoot back to the edge of the grass to get it. He had to spin around to throw to first and Rowe was a fast man carrying the mail. Second was the only chance.

Lou Bracker hopped to the bag to take the throw and Seffler came in to second like a football player throwing a body block.

"Okay, pal," Lou said just as the ball hit the palm of his glove. He got set and let Seffler hit him, bunched every muscle of his one hundred and eighty pounds for the shock. Seffler spun over Lou Bracker's head and crashed to the ground. He stayed where he was while Lou walked around rubbing the muscles of his shoulder. He knew the Metros were on their way to the wars. He could hear their angry yells. He stooped down close to Seffler and picked something out of the dust.

Chipman shoved Lou Bracker away from Seffler, and stuck his chin close to the Blues' pilot's face.

"Take it away, Sam, or I'll cave it in," Bracker said, then they were surrounded by players of both teams. The cops came in and the Metro trainer helped Seffler up. The outfielder's face was pale

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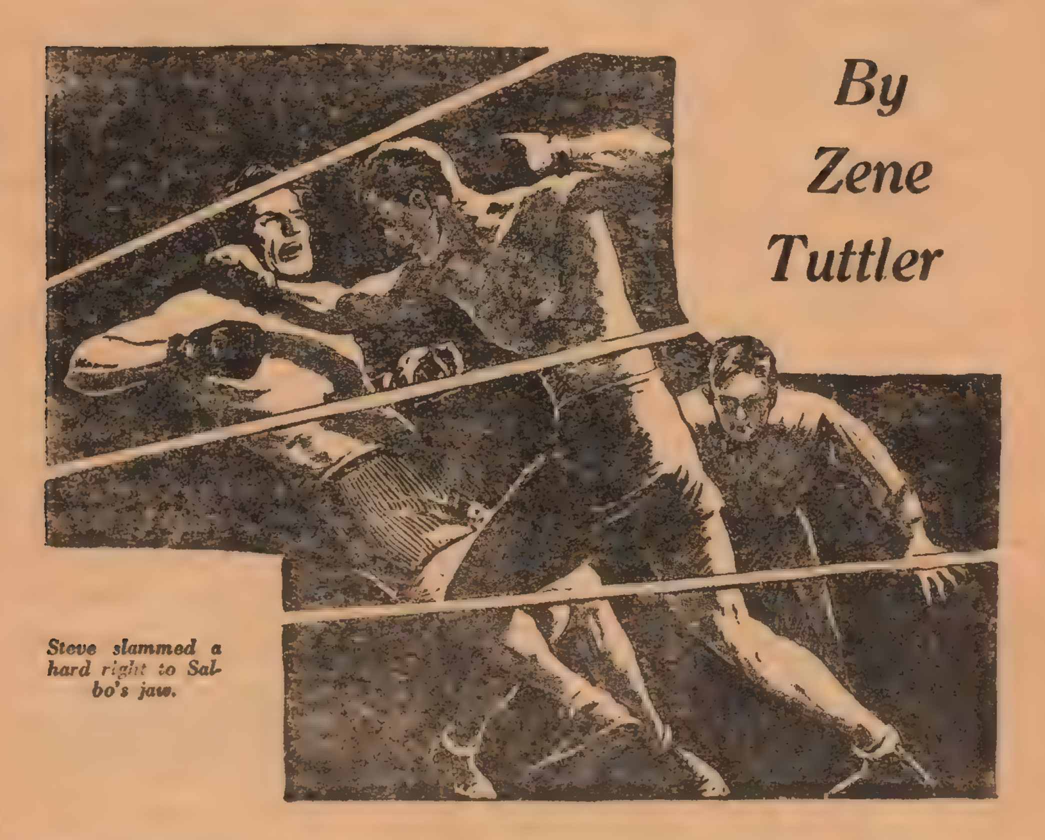
from Lefty. You're a frank and honest cuss, Lou. Your eyes give you away all the time. Could you use a good coach?"

"Right here you tell me," Lou grinned and pushed back his chair. "Come on, kid. It's crowded here."

An hour later, Lou knew he was not dreaming. They talked about Lefty and Madge said he'd forget easy. Pitching against those Japs in a dive bomber and setting up a strike-out record. Beaning them with his fast ones and gambling every minute. Lefty lived to take chances, like turning Madge Talbot over to a guy like Lou Bracker. A gambler has to lose sometime.



The Ghost in the Ring



By Zene Tuttler

Steve slammed a hard right to Salbo's jaw.

All the champ wanted to do was to cut that tramp Salbo to pieces. He'd fought his way up to this fistic revenge for two years. Yet when he got in the ring, grudge dukes made hash of his crown vengeance plans.

STEVE RILEY was angry. He had a job to do and he wanted to get it over with in a hurry. He scowled through the blue tobacco smoke at the reporters who filled the dressing room. The jabber got on his nerves.

A reporter said, "Kayo, Champ?" Another reporter said, "How many rounds, Champ?"

Riley jumped off the rubbing table. "Scram!" he snarled. "The whole bunch of you. Beat it!"

The group of reporters shot puzzled looks at him. Eddie Dorgan, the champ's manager, frowned. Riley herded the reporters towards the door.

"You guys make me sick!" he snapped. "Take the air!"

The reporters looked at Eddie Dorgan. Little bald-headed Dorgan was the only one who could handle the champ when he got like that.

Dorgan said, "That's all, boys. The Champ trained hard, you know."

The reporters shuffled out. Riley slammed the door, then got back on the rubbing table with a scowl and tapped his feet against the floor.

Dorgan said, "You shouldn't have done that, Steve. They'll fill the papers tomorrow with that hungry tiger snarling for raw meat stuff."

"Aw, I'm sick and tired of their silly yapping," retorted Riley. " 'Think you'll take him, Champ? How many rounds, Champ?' Nuts to them! I won't have to take any more of that junk after tonight."

"They're paid for doing that, Steve. It's their job."

"Yeah? Well, where were they when Joe hit the skids, eh? They pestered the kid plenty when he was headed for the top. But they left him alone like poison when he lost to Salbo."

Dorgan started a reply. Riley shouted, "They shoved him outa the ring, see? Salbo started it and they finished it. They undermined his confidence, see? The kid was headed places. Joe was good, he—"

Steve stopped. He bit his lips, then stared in silence at the floor.

Dorgan said in a soft voice. "Sure, Steve. Joe was good at everything he did. Even when the Japs—"

"Shut up!" roared Riley. "Joe wouldn't want any of that stuff."

"Yeah, Joe wouldn't," Dorgan said. He hesitated with his hand on the door. "I'll be out in the hall." He went out.

Riley sat on the rubbing table with a bitter face. He had waited for his revenge for a long time. Ever since the night Sammy Salbo plastered Joe Riley all over the ring for six rounds and got a technical kayo.

Joe never had been the same after that. He tried a comeback, but his confidence was shot to pieces. The lightning footwork and dazzling speed which the experts said made him a cinch to be the next welterweight champ suffered from indecision. Joe lost to a couple ham-and-eggers and retired from the ring at the age of twenty-two.

THAT'S when Steve had hit the revenge trail after Sammy Salbo. Steve did not hear from Joe for a long time. The first thing he heard from him, Joe was a rear machine-gunner in the Solomons. The next thing he heard of him, the War Department deeply regretted to inform him that Joe had been shot down and was listed as missing in action.

Something had exploded in Steve then. He had been a fair welter with a good punch in both hands and average speed. But he lacked the spark, the tiger spirit which made champs.

He got that spirit when he heard about Joe. He blamed Salbo for that. Salbo had knocked the stuffing out of Joe, started him on the downward grade. Joe would have been the champ if it had not been for Salbo's murderous punches.

Steve's furious punching from then on and spectacular string of kayos won him a crack at the champ. Steve knocked the champ cold in the second round, then settled back to wait for Salbo.

Salbo gave him the runaround. His manager claimed Salbo was too green yet to enter the ring with Steve. Steve had waited impatiently. While he waited, he sharpened his gunsights by flattening opponent after opponent. A year after he won the title, public clamor forced Salbo to sign for the fight.

It was Steve's night tonight. He could tell them all to go to hell after the fight.

After he flattened Salbo and got revenge for Joe, he was enlisting. He was going to the Pacific to find Joe. Something told him Joe was around yet. Joe was good; he was too good to let some lousy Japs get rid of him that easy. Steve was impatient to get started.

The door opened. A girl walked in. She was small and quiet, her face was smooth and round. But it was her eyes which people always noticed, the same deep blue eyes which once meant the world to Steve. That was before he became champ.

He scowled at the door. He snapped, "Beat it the way you came in and tell Eddie Dorgan to quit the wise stuff. He sent for you, didn't he?"

"I came myself," she said. She fumbled with a handkerchief, then added hesitantly, "Steve, I wish you would be careful tonight."

Steve laughed. He said, "That's hot. Salbo's girl telling me to be careful. What's the matter? Salbo scared?"

Her eyes flashed. "He's not afraid of anyone."

"No? Then how come he gave me the runaround for a year?"

"He wanted to fight you. His manager would not let him. Sammy is a good boy."

Steve's eyes glinted. He said, "I hope you still think so after the fight."

She shook her head. "You think you're hard, Steve," she said. "But there are two kinds of hardness. You're hard outside and soft inside. Sammy is soft outside and hard inside. If you try slugging with him tonight, he'll knock you out."

He threw back his head and laughed. The laughter died suddenly on his lips and he snarled, "G'wan back to your Sammy. Tell him when I get through with him, he'll never fight again."

She bit her lips. She said, "You've changed a lot, Steve. You're not the man you used to be before you won the title." Her face became firm, she turned and walked out of the dressing room.

Steve stared at the door. The hardness left his face. The old feeling was still there for Edith, but he never would let her know it. She wanted him to quit when he had won the title; he refused. There was a quarrel and she had told him to forget about her until he changed his mind.

Whispers started about her going places with Salbo. He saw them together at a night spot once. That had killed his last hope that things would work out all right. He had tried to harden himself against her. But he never had succeeded.

DORGAN came in the room and the call went up for the main bout. Steve went down the aisle with Dorgan and the handlers behind him. He got a big hand from the crowd when he stepped into the ring. Sammy Salbo sat in his corner with his arms stretched along the ropes. Salbo had a clean expressionless face. The papers called him "The Baby-faced Assassin." Only the powerful sloping shoulders betrayed the dynamite in his fists.

Salbo nodded. Steve scowled and turned away.

There was the announcer's introductions, then the referee called them to the center of the ring. The bloodthirsty crowd howled. Steve did not hear them or the referee. He kept thinking back to the night Joe fought Salbo. He kept seeing flashes of Joe reeling around the ring with bloodstained features. Only his guts had kept him on his feet. And he saw the picture of Salbo stalking him with a bland face. He would put some expression into that face tonight. Some blood-smeared expression.

Salbo looked straight at hm. Steve looked down at the canvas. The referee said, "You guys been around long enough to know your Markis o' Queensberry so make this a good clean fight all the way now shake hands and come out fighting at the bell."

Salbo shoved out his gloves. Steve ignored them and went to his corner. The crowd shouted at his contemptuous gesture. They had turned out for a bloody grudge fight, all the signs pointed to one.

The bell clanged. Steve came out of his corner in a smooth glide. Salbo met him in the center of the ring. Steve swung a left and cocked his right. His left connected to the ribs, a hard blow smashed against his face.

Steve went scowling into a crouch. He drove both fists to the body. Salbo took them and whaled away at Steve. The crowd was on its feet with a yell. They had expected action, but not right from the opening bell.

Both fighters pounded away toe to toe. Steve snarled and put everything he had behind his punches. His gloves smacked against a stone wall. Salbo kept shooting them back. Salbo connected with a hard right to the jaw just before the bell. A flash blazed before Steve's eyes, then they cleared and he walked away scowling.

Dorgan said, "A couple more like the last one, Champ, and it's too bad."

"Aw, I didn't even feel it," snapped Steve. He was lying, that punch had hurt plenty.

His eyes scanned the ringside seats. Edith was there. She met his eyes and turned away.

The bell rang for the second. Steve picked up where he had left off. He

launched a two-fisted barrage to Salbo's body. Salbo pounded back without giving ground. Steve took the battering with gritted teeth. Salbo could keep on pounding away. One or the other would wear out from the grind. Salbo's steam would disappear from his punches when Steve's body blows took their toll.

Both men rocked each other with violent rights. The crowd was wild. Steve slammed a vicious uppercut to the jaw near the end of the round and Salbo tottered. Steve rushed in, but Salbo recovered and lanced a right to the nose which drew blood.

Steve went to his corner with the crowd cheering. He was panting when he sat down.

THEY kept up the punishing pace through the third and fourth rounds. Steve snarled and fought with everything he had in an effort to make Salbo give ground. But Salbo stubbornly refused to give way and punched right back.

Steve's arms were punch weary in the fifth. He slowed down a bit to rest them. Salbo whistled a looping right to the jaw and Steve flew back against the ropes. Salbo tore in. Steve dodged and staggered Salbo with a long right to the jaw. The round ended with the crowd on its feet.

Steve went to his corner fighting for air. His face was hot and his heart pounded. Dorgan said, "How you feel?"

Steve snarled, "The guy must be made outa steel!"

Steve was the first to feel the gruelling pace in the sixth. He let up with his body attack and Salbo rocked him off balance with jolting lefts and rights. Steve tried to get set for a counterattack, but Salbo kept his fists going like brown pistons. Steve jabbed a long left to the head and cocked his right.

He saw an opening and shot his right for Salbo's jaw. Too late he saw his mistake. Salbo had craftily left that opening.

Salbo beat him to the punch with a terrific right to the jaw. Steve flew off his feet and hit the canvas on his back. He rolled over on his side and laid there.

The crowd roared. He was down! The champ was down! Steve looked up and saw the referee's white-shirted arm flash over him. He heard the count above the crowd's roar:

"Two! Three!"

Steve scrambled to his feet. Salbo came in fast. Steve was ready for him. He beat Salbo to the punch and pounded him back with the fury of his attack. He looped a wild right to the jaw and it was Salbo's turn to hit the canvas. Salbo was up without a count. The bell rang.

Steve turned towards his corner on unsteady legs. The crowd was wild. Dorgan took a look at Steve's bloodshot eyes and was quiet.

Steve said, "I'll soften him up yet. When I do—"

Salbo lagged a little coming out for the seventh. Steve tore in and connected with a terrific right to the jaw. Salbo hit the canvas and rolled over. The crowd screamed.

Salbo was up groggy at eight. Steve came in fast. Salbo tried to paw into a clinch. Steve shoved him away and banged a right off his jaw. Salbo wobbled, but stayed up. Steve jumped in pumping lefts and rights to the jaw. Salbo staggered and rocked, but kept his feet.

Steve snarled and pounded Salbo all over the ring. Salbo reeled drunkenly, but the only time he went down was when he slipped to one knee. He took a count of six before he got up. The bell rang before Steve could get to him.

Steve went to his corner with burning muscles in his arms and legs. Salbo had taken everything he had and still was on his feet. The guy was a human punching bag. Steve had to give him credit for guts, plenty of guts. Certain matters began to get a little clearer for him. He could understand now why Salbo had beaten Joe. The guy was fairly fast, had a kick like a mule in both fists and was a glutton for punishment. No other man had taken all that from Steve and still stayed on his feet.

Steve came out fast for the eighth round. Salbo was slow. Steve knew all he had to do to gain the decision was box now, but he didn't want it that way. He wanted to knock Salbo kicking. For Joe.

He whistled a hard left at Salbo. In his haste, it was wild. Salbo ducked and drove an uppercut to the body. The air whistled out of Steve's lungs. He bit his lips in pain and doubled over. A hard right to the jaw straightened him up. A straight left to the jaw sent him reeling back.

Salbo saw his big chance. He jumped in with his right and put everything in his powerful shoulders behind it. The blow landed on Steve's jaw and Steve hit the canvas on his back.

He rolled over with a groan and laid motionless. He saw the referee counting over him and struggled to get up. His mind was clear, but he had no control over his aching body. He laid there in a trance. He could hear the roar of the crowd and he could see the referee's arm.

"Seven! Eight!" Steve gritted his teeth. It was one helluva way to even things up for Joe. Being counted out flat on his back. Salbo hadn't won over Joe that way. Why, if Joe was the kind you could count out flat on his back, there would be no use going to look for him.

STEVE got up groggy at nine. Salbo nailed him with a left, but Steve slipped the hard right and went into a clinch. He looked over Salbo's shoulder at the yelling crowd.

Some were shouting and banging their fists together for Salbo to finish it. Others were pleading for Steve to come back. He looked at Edith. Her eyes were wide. She was looking straight at him. Her face was strained and pale, but what he saw in her eyes told him it was he and not Salbo she was worried about.

Steve broke out of the clinch ashamed at letting her see him like this. He, the tough guy. The hard guy who was gonna knock Salbo stiff.

Salbo nailed him with a left and right and there was no strength left in Steve's legs. He toppled over. He took six and got up. The referee looked anxiously at him. Steve waved him away. His nose bled and there was a big lump under one eye. Salbo's mouth bled and there was a big lump on one cheekbone. But there were no bloody cuts.

Salbo hit him a left and right and Steve slid off the ropes on one knee, then pulled himself back up. Salbo said, "Aw, why don't you stay down? I'm all tired out hitting you!"

It struck Steve funny. He grinned and said, "How'd you think I got this way?" He blasted a long left to the jaw.

Salbo went back on weary legs. Steve hit him with a right and Salbo went down. It took Salbo five before he could grab the ropes and pull himself to his feet. He tore in at Steve.

Steve tied him up and said, "What's your hurry?"

Salbo said wearily, "Gotta get a good night's sleep after I win the crown. I enlist tomorrow. Gonna find me a guy named Joe before the cannibals get him. Joe Riley. But he's a better guy than you because I never could knock him off his feet."

Salbo shot a right to the jaw. Steve dropped to one knee. Salbo lurched off balance from his punch and grabbed the ropes to steady himself.

Steve was up and waiting for him. "Yeah," he said. "You're right. I only hope you got as much guts as he has so I can knock you stiff before you quit."

They punched at each other through the ninth and tenth rounds with the crowd in a continuous din. In desperate last second haymakers both men missed and fell against each other at the final gong. The crowd gave them an ovation which boomed around the arena for fifteen minutees.. The referee's and both judges' slips were collected.

The announcer frowned at the slips. He held up his hand for silence. "The winner!" came the announcement, "and still champeen! Steve Riley!"

Steve rushed across the ring. Salbo met him halfway. They threw their arms around each other's shoulders, and Steve said, "Sammy, you was robbed!"

Salbo's eyes sparkled. There was a tired grin on his face. "Never mind the speeches," he said. "Ol' Sergeant Joe is prowling around those Pacific jungles and hogging all the fun knocking the Japs cuckoo. C'mon, we got us a job to do."

Larry Hanlon had been a track champion before he was a salesman. But in order to win that world mile record, Larry had to pay a high price for those. . . .

Miles for Sale



By Richard Brister

IT WAS almost time. Everything lay in a neat pile before him—spikes, adhesive, earplugs, a towel for a muffler. He was pulling white wool socks on his feet when a shadow fell on him. He looked up and recognized Jim Keenan, the syndicated sports writer, in the doorway.

Keenan's quick eyes had found the earplugs already. "Looks like you might be going swimming, Larry."

"Yeah," Larry said.

"How do you feel? Gonna take 'em?"

"Maybe. Who knows?" Larry said and walked out, stepping carefully in stocking feet on the gravelly rubble. Perhaps he was rude, but he never liked talking before a race. The slightest activity could wear you down and he didn't want anything to go wrong today.

The finalists were lined up for the sixty-yard highs when he reached the track. He found a shaded spot by the grandstand and flopped on his stomach.

This was his ninety-first race coming up, and in a way it was all very silly. He'd started running as a kid because it was two miles to school and you kept warmer running. Later when he showed up for the mile at high school, he ran 4:40 his first time out.

He won his first race in 4:32, rating a line or two in the local paper. Larry liked the look of his name in print so he kept it there the next three seasons.

He won the National Inter-Scholastic, his senior year, in 4:21:5. There was nothing for it but college. At State he majored in English. He didn't learn much about Shakespeare, but he ran 4:12 in his final year.

Six years ago, that was. And now he was twenty-seven years old; he sold whisky for a living—and he was still running mile races.

He took off the white sweat socks, shook out his spikes and laced them on, strapping them tight with the roll of adhesive.

Joe Cogan came walking over.

Cogan was slight and hard in the Cunningham, Lovelock tradition. There were beads of sweat on his forehead where the hot sun hit him.

"Hi-yuh," he said. His drawl sounded relaxed, but he was a bundle of frazzled nerves now, as always with a race impending.

"Siddown," Larry said. "Take the load off. Relax."

Cogan was bouncing up and down on his toes, calf muscles rippling. "I gotta stay loose."

The sun was dipping behind the grandstand. It was hot, but the air was as fresh and clear as spring water.

"Good day for it," Larry said.

"Yeah," Cogan said. "It's a day for a record."

The big horns blared first call for their race. Cogan wheeled and jogged around the rim toward the start. Larry lay where he was. It was hot enough to forego his warm-up. Anyhow first call didn't count. There'd be the usual stalling around while the crowd's appetite whetted.

He tried to relax, but couldn't. For no reason that made any sense at a time like now, he got to thinking about Peg Starrett and how it had been between them.

Two years ago he'd gone back to State to run a special mile for old Pop Lanning. Cogan was there; and it was Larry Hanlon, the picture runner, against Cogan, the bantam truck horse with the world famous kick.

Larry went out fast with his graceful ground-eating steps. He grabbed the lead at the midway mark and for a while held it. He thought he had the race on ice until the last fifty yards when Cogan came pounding up and took over.

Larry tried to sprint with him. He couldn't sprint. The beautiful stride deserted him. The juice drained out of him and Cogan romped home. Pop was pleased though. The time was 4:9:8 and it made all the papers.

THAT night at the Inn, Larry felt like a grandfather among the current crop of rug cutters. The campus wisecracks and pat phrases left him unaccountably bored. He was going to sneak away early when he spotted the girl.

She was dancing with a red-faced kid who was built like a halfback. She moved in a graceful halo of lacy white, accented by scarlet slippers and a single rose in coal-black hair. The minute he saw her Larry moved across the floor and cut in.

He tried to remember how he'd danced in college. He said hesitating, "I'm Larry Hanlon. I. . . ."

"I know." The husky tone of her voice tickled a sudden void in his stomach. "I saw you run today," she said. "I'm Peg Starrett."

Her eyes were half closed as she glided with him; her lips were parted. She liked to dance and was not going to talk. Time was passing. In a moment he'd lose her.

He said, "You live up this way?"

"I live in Norristown, Pennsylvania."

He cracked a broad smile. "Main and DeKalb?" he asked. "Or Swede and Airy?"

She smiled in surprise and the soft curve of full lips hung him right up to dry. He rushed to explain, "I make your town every month. I'm a liquor salesman."

"Make it?"

"It's in my territory," he said. "Look, we have things in common, don't we?" He shot an apprehensive glance around for the halfback. "Let's go some place for a while and . . ."

Her eyes dropped. "I'm with somebody. I'm sorry."

In a way, he was glad. He said simply, "Miss Peg Starrett. And if a guy was passing through and wanted to phone, it would be Norristown—?"

"0817."

He called her up on his next trip through. They took in a Bob Taylor show and spent an hour or two in a local hot spot. And so it began. There was no telling how it would end. They'd been engaged six months now, but no date set. He had to be more sure of his job, he told her.

She looked surprised. "But you've had it for years. What more do you want?"

"I want everything," Larry said, "when you're in it. Right now things are too uncertain."

"That's true in any business," she said.

"Well—maybe." He let it drop. In a way it was shame that kept him from explaining things further.

He'd been with the liquor concern since graduation—just clerking at first—until they shifted him onto the sales force.

"I'm no salesman," he told them. "I don't like people. I'd rather stay in the office."

And old man Warriner said, "You don't have to like people. Not with your reputation."

There it was. They were buying his name. Larry Hanlon, former world's champion. Picture runner. He came to hate that tag.

But the money was good. He kept running because if he didn't, the fans would forget, and that would raise hob with the juicy commissions. He was up a blind alley of course. The end of running would also end his career. The worst part was that after the first two years he'd begun to like it. He began to sell cold to people who didn't know him or what his name stood for. He made a study of selling. If he could get in solid before he hung up his spikes, they'd have to keep him. And then he and Peg . . .

There wasn't much time. Cunningham reached his peak about twenty-eight before the inevitable anticlimax. Larry was twenty-seven.

ONE day he went in and said to the boss, "I can only run a couple more years. The way I see it. . . ."

"Nonsense," Warriner clucked. "No telling how long you'll hang on if you stay in training."

"I don't want to hang on. I'm sick of training. I'm twenty-seven years old. It's time I gave up this kid stuff."

"You're stale, Hanlon. Go home and get a good night's rest. You'll feel differently in the morning."

Larry wouldn't feel differently in the morning, or any other morning. "If you'll listen to what I'm trying to say," he said, "I won't take up any more of your time."

Warriner looked stolidly at him. "Just what *is* your trouble?"

"I want to know where I stand. I'm learning this business. A man has to be four years on the road unless he's hopeless. Look at my record."

"You're getting some nice orders lately, Hanlon."

"Enough?"

Warriner coughed. "I don't get you."

"Enough to hold this job if I decide to quit running?"

He watched the old man's face grow stubborn. "Frankly, Hanlon, the answer is no."

"But I *am* improving?"

"Of course."

"But not enough. And if I don't make the grade before I'm through running, you'll let me out?"

The old man's eyes wavered. "We have no kick about your work, Hanlon. You're not top man. Nor bottem either, but a year or two from now, if you quit running, you might be. There's no use overlooking the help of a well-known name—in this business especially. Once folks forget who you are. . . ." His shoulders rose in an empty gesture.

Larry nodded. It was cute, he thought. Oh, very. He simply would have to become a real salesman before he quit running. That was going to take some doing. He was a quiet guy. He'd never been much of a mixer. But maybe the best salesmen were just his type—the converted introverts, the cool quiet guys who made themselves friendly. The bluff smile and the slap on the back were out. Salesmen were made, but it took years to do it.

There was still some time—a year more of running, another perhaps before the sports-minded public forgot him. Did they have to forget him? He wondered. They hadn't forgotten Cunningham or Paavo Nurmi.

There was the answer. Hang up a record, something for each year's crop of newcomers to aim at. Every time they came close you were back in the headlines, a perennial big shot.

The next time he worked through State he looked up Pop Lanning.

"I wanta rack up next year, Pop. But first I wanta hang up a record. Got any ideas?"

Pop wagged his gray head and looked like a cynic. "World's record, Larry?"

Larry nodded and Pop said, "You're crazy."

Larry wanted reasons why. Pop said, "I had you for three years up here and I've seen you run plenty. You've got pace; you've got a sweet running style. As pretty as a picture, but you're no world champion."

Larry got stubborn. "Why?" he persisted.

Pop started picking fluff off his coat. "You're a front runner, kid. When the going gets tough you fold up. Not that you don't have the guts. It's trying to match the other guy's sprint that kills you. It busts your beautiful stride wide open just when you need it. You can't sprint. Stride's all you've got and you know it."

"So I run one race and forget the others. I pace it, Pop. I could do it. There's a record in it."

Pop shook his head. "Better men than you have tried it."

Larry wasn't convinced. It was his champion's pride, he supposed. What Pop said stung plenty. He'd never figured himself that way, in the years he'd been running.

That winter he really went into training. Joe Cogan licked him twice in the Garden, but the times were good.

Larry dreamed up a crazy plan, based on what Pop said. It was a screwball stunt, a long shot. But what better time could there be for a gamble?

HE GOT UP, relaxed and easy, and loped toward the start. Bellotti, in from the coast, looked burned and fit, trained to the minute. Joe Cogan trembled with nerves as he knelt digging holes. Levering of Columbia, the fourth entrant, was standing by idly.

In the draw Larry got the second lane, with Levering on the pole and Joe Cogan and Bellotti outside him.

The hubbub from the grandstand died and the booming horns took over, identifying their names and numbers. The starter flicked a final cartridge into his pistol and his arm came up as he faced them.

"On your marks."

Larry got down in his holes and took a deep lungful of air. Joe Cogan's calf muscles were trembling beside him. He saw Cogan's quick harsh breaths and wondered how the man had become a champion, wasting so much before the race started.

"Now set!"

On fingertips, eyes straight ahead. He would take the lead from the start. He smiled, thinking how that would flabbergast them. Larry Hanlon, the picture runner, racing it out for pole position.

He wouldn't strain. He would hit a fast comfortable stride, figuring his opening lap somewhere around sixty, with no competition too near him.

His earplugs were in. He came forward a bit and the strain on his thumbs pained him slightly. His legs felt warm. He had not wasted an ounce of strength. He was as right for this race as he'd ever be in his life.

The report of the gun broke through his earplugs. He went straining forward, almost like a sprinter, but not so low and without that much drive. His arms settled into their effortless swinging, making lazy arcs. He surged past Levering onto the pole and hugged it to him.

His legs rode out and back with oily precision. No real effort to it, but he knew he was clicking off a keen first quarter.

Off the second turn and past the starting position, ten yards ahead of the field, he flicked a glance at the stadium clock. Fifty-seven. *Fifty-seven!*

The next trip around would have to be slower. Let nature take care of that. He busied himself with maintaining pace.

Not one step had faltered since the plunging strides when he'd taken over. He thought about that in terms of time and his feet continued their graceful gliding, flicking pebbles and rubble behind him. It was fun out in front giving the others a taste of the cinder eating.

On the way past the stand for the second time the roars of the crowd came dimly to him. The earplugs smothered the sound. It didn't ruffle his steady pace and he congratulated himself on the earplug idea.

On the far stretch, Bellotti came up. Larry knew who was making the challenge. Instinct, he guessed, but it *would* be Bellotti. The Californian did not know pace, and Larry's antics had flustered him badly.

Larry thought, "Pop thinks I'll blow up now in response to this challenge. He thinks I'll sprint."

The turn came on them. He bent toward the rim, spikes still clicking up and back smoothly. He was breathing hard. The earplugs smothered Bellotti's footfalls, but now he could almost feel the man on his tail. He hugged the inner edge of the track and turned his eyes away from Bellotti.

His legs flowed out and back, smooth, unruffled. Bellotti forged up, began to pass, pumping all out for that pole.

LARRY glided along. The turn rolled swiftly toward them. Larry was amazed and pleased as the Californian, too cagy to run extra yardage outside, slowed and dropped back.

Larry thought, "Just roll along and don't break that pace. Stay relaxed and it breaks their hearts."

He chugged past the stand to complete the third lap. The gun barked hollowly. The tumult from the crowd pierced his earplugs. Gun lap excitement, he guessed, or did it mean that the others were coming!

His lungs and legs screamed in protest that he'd run a record three-quarters. Sweat stung his eyes. His thighs were aching. The endless black treadmill beneath him hazed. It was hard now to stay loose and hold rhythm. His chest was a furnace, his throat the chimney, his breath the leaping gusts of hot air.

He kept on rolling. His legs were wobbling. But he held that pace around the turn. Only the straightaway, the final turn, and the homestretch beckoned.

Joe Cogan made his bid on the far stretch. Larry's legs were flailing. Again he turned his eyes away and they fought it out down the straightaway, seesawing. Larry hung grimly onto his stride. He felt an upsurge of hope when Cogan faded before the turn.

Larry never knew how he reached the homestretch. A red hot coal was jammed in his throat and his legs belonged to somebody else. He wanted to quit. He wanted desperately to look back at Joe Cogan.

Maybe that earplug idea wasn't so hot. Ignoring the crowd and the competition was fine in one way, but you learn to depend on those things. He missed the contagious kick he always drew from the crowd's excitement, hearing them yell

as he climbed the heels of the guy ahead. The screams were a thousand miles away to his ears—and the only substitute lay inside of him somewhere.

"Glide," he told himself. "Glide on in!" He lurched, stumbling. Instinct yanked him back into rhythm. The muffled tumult about him grew and grew. It was Cogan coming.

The little truck horse was sprinting beside him, surging forward. The famous kick. Larry gauged the yards to the tape and looked at Cogan. Something told him the guy couldn't make it. No man could hold such a sprint with this race behind him. Cogan's face was grotesque with effort and pain.

Larry looked at the tape. He was in the center of the wide smooth track, still striding and gliding in, but it wouldn't last if he kept watching Cogan. Cogan was folding. Larry was folding himself and he was going to flop on his face if he fumbled once slightly.

Fifteen more yards and now for the final cog of his plan. He closed his eyes and kept on rolling tapeward in blackness.

It was odd, running with your eyes clamped shut, running to beat a man, but not looking at him. He did not fall because for hours, in practice, he had run like this; at first on grass and falling often, but the knack had come with grudging slowness. And now for fifteen yards he knew he could run on a line that didn't vary an inch from his target.

He rolled on in darkness holding that stride. He felt the soft snap of the tape as it broke and dangled around him. Then he was lurching, falling. A pair of arms clamped around him, hoisted him up.

He sat down on the grass and hunched over weakly, lungs heaving.

When he came out of the dressing room an hour later, Peg was waiting for him. The expression in her eyes and face lifted the weariness bodily from him.

She said, "There's your record, Larry."

"Four six, even," he beamed. "I can't believe it. Give these kids something to shoot at, I reckon."

Her face was grave. "For a long while, Larry."

"Look," he said, "let's go out and get mildly plastered."

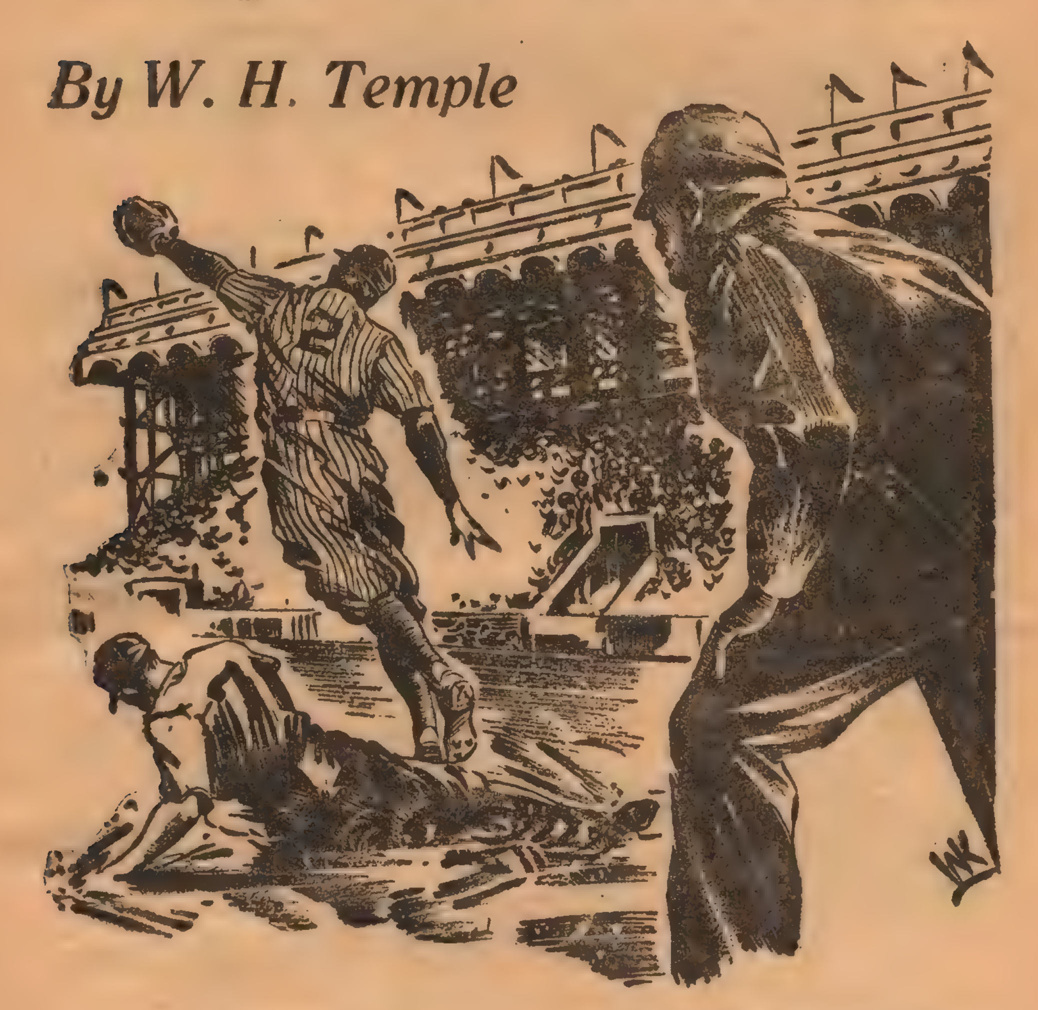
"Larry!" Her eyes were wide pools of surprise. "The new world's champion!"

"I'm all through running. I've been selling the stuff for six years and I never tried it. It's time I learned if it's any good. After all—a world's champion salesman. . . ."

That sounded conceited, he thought, and wondered idly how to revise it. His shoulders came up and his chest came out; he let it ride. "Champion salesman. All right, why not?"

Pop-Off Rookie

By W. H. Temple



★ ★ ★

Jig Clayton was more interested in his own batting average than in his team's standing. But when a pop-off shortstop took Jig's mind off the ball, he found himself fighting alone against that holler guy's infield feud.

★ ★ ★

AS USUAL, Jig Clayton was late getting to the training camp. Jig was always late, but this year the team was training in the North and so Jig held out a month. It wasn't the salary really, the contract was O.K., but if the owners wanted to loosen up for another grand Jig had no objection.

Jig lived in Florida anyway and he liked warm weather. Pete Bland, the manager of the Bears, called up twice and wanted to know where the hell he was.

"Sittin' in the sun," Jig said. "Don't you wish you was me?"

What Pete said cannot be recorded on the printed page. But a week later, after two telegrams had no effect on Jig, he received another wire stating that he would be automatically fined two hundred dollars for every additional day he was absent from camp. Jig packed his suitcase that night. Jig could hear very well when anyone mentioned money.

He arrived at the camp in due time. There was a cold breeze blowing over the diamond and the squad was hard at work. Jig walked out of the clubhouse, a windbreaker over his uniform, and shivered in the cold. He went gloomily across to the bumpy makeshift diamond where the Bears were training this year.

Pete Bland was waiting for him at the batting cage. He looked sourly at Jig Clayton and didn't offer to shake hands.

"Nice of you to show up," Pete said surlily. "Half the squad's in the Army; we can hardly put nine men on the field. You sure picked a fine year to hold out."

"I'll be ready," Jig said. He nodded at his teammates. Batting practice was under way, and a moment later Jig shed his windbreaker and stepped to the right side of the plate.

A rookie was on the mound, throwing fast balls down the alley. Jig sighted on the first one, fouled it off, then got his range. He had a loose and effortless swing. Three times the ball came in and three times it went over the left field bleachers. Jig dropped a bunt toward third and ambled casually around the bases and back to Pete Bland.

"You see," Jig said. "I'm in shape."

"Take second," Pete said. "Let's see if you can bend that beer-belly."

Jig started toward his position. All the past month he'd been working out with a semi-pro team in Florida. But they didn't need to know that. Jig grinned as he stepped into position. Big Slattery was holding down first, Mike Sabo third, both of them veterans. But at short was a newcomer, a sandy-haired kid from the minors, replacing Art Hammel, now in the Navy. He was a long-legged guy, clumsy looking and he had a loud mouth.

"All right, Pete," he yelled, "let's go. We got the old pepper out here."

Jig Clayton did not like pop-off rookies. He scowled and then watched Manager Bland hit a ground ball to third. Mike swallowed it up, tossed to first, and the kid shortstop yelled, "Attaboy, Mike."

Pete slammed one to short. The kid fell on his chin, but he got the ball and pegged a bullet across the diamond into Slattery's big mitt. He got up, dirt on his uniform, and he was still yelling.

PETE swung the light bat and the ball hopped right for Jig Clayton. He ran in three steps, then set himself. The infield was rough, the ball hit a pebble and bounced high. Jig threw up his glove, the ball went off the fingers and shot out into right field.

The shortstop yelled, "Make them easy for him, Pete. He's been sittin' on his tail in Florida."

"Shut your mouth, busher," Jig yelled and set himself for the next grounder. Pete Bland, grinning, rapped a hard shot toward second base. Jig cut to his right, scooped, and the ball was in his glove. He was off balance, but the shortstop had upset his pride. He whirled with a snap throw to first. His arm wasn't really loose yet, the ball went high over Slattery's head toward the stands.

The shortstop sounded off again. "Don't make him chase it, Pete. He tried to throw that one all the way back to the sunny South."

Jig Clayton turned and walked over to the shortstop. "Listen, busher," he said savagely, "I been the second sacker on this team for seven years. Now button that lip before I do it for you."

The kid had tossed his glove away. He was a head taller than Jig. He said, "You may be a star in the papers, but with me you're strictly a bum. Any ballplayer who holds out a year like this is a tramp. If you don't like it, start swinging."

Jig pushed the shortstop roughly. The kid swung a wild right hand and Jig stepped inside it. He threw his own right, drilling it straight to the chin, and the shortstop went over like a ladder in the wind.

"Let's play some ball," Jig said, striding back to position.

The kid wasn't hurt, he got up again and the workout went on. At its conclusion, Jig Clayton was puffing. He went slowly into the clubhouse and he knew that he was somewhat of a lone wolf. He had never been especially popular with his mates, he'd always gone his own way. But he could tell now that they had sided with the shortstop this morning. The kid's name was Eddie Duncan.

As the days went by, Jig had to admit that the rookie was a ballplayer. He made a lot of errors, but he was fast with a great pair of hands, and he could cover more territory than the veteran Hammel he had replaced.

The thing that burned Jig Clayton was the way the kid took charge of the infield, shouting to the boys where to throw the ball as though they were rookies and he was the mainstay of the infield.

They played their first exhibition game of the year against the Sox. In the first inning, with the Sox at bat and men on first and second, the batter lashed a grounder past the pitcher's mound.

Eddie Duncan raced in for it, scooped, and fired a throw back toward second base. Jig Clayton's foot stabbed the bag and the ball was in his glove. He pivoted, threw to first, but the batter beat his throw by a step.

"A little more pepper in there," Duncan yelled. "Get the lead out of your feet."

Jig thought he'd really have to nail that kid. The game went on and Jig played his customary solid game. They made three double plays. After it was over and the Bears had won, Manager Pete Bland sought out Jig Clayton in the clubhouse.

"You played ball out there today," he said. "The kid's making you step, Jig."

"He's a busher," Jig said. "He'll crack. A holler guy. A pop-off."

Pete Bland nodded. "Yeah, and a fighter all the way. Something you never were, Clayton. You're a good ballplayer, but you never really give."

Jig Clayton said, "I've hit over three hundred the last four years. Two of those years I was the best fielding second baseman in the league."

"Sure," Pete said. "You don't make many errors. If you think you can't get to a ball, you don't try for it. You play it safe. You play the game for Jig Clayton."

"Listen, Bland," Jig snapped at him, "if you don't like the way I play that bag, trade me somewheres else."

Pete Bland grinned. "I'll hang on to you, Clayton. I'm looking for that pennant this year. You might help me get it. And then again, you might not. It sort of depends on Eddie Duncan."

THE squad finished its training and traveled the sixty miles back to its own park for the season's opening. The writers who covered the team were going in for pennant talk. The Bears had finished in the first division the last five years, always close but never at the top.

There was a new spirit in the team this year. Jig Clayton could see it. The Bears had always been a veteran team. They didn't get excited on or off the field. They were good mechanical ballplayers and they didn't make many mistakes. But they took things calmly. This year was different.

Opening day, before they took to the field, Eddie Duncan sat in the dugout, barbering the opposing ball club. He had a high pitched voice that carried across the field. Jig Clayton listened awhile, then said wearily, "Pipe down."

First baseman Slattery said, "Leave the kid be, Clayton."

"So you've fallen for him too," Jig said. "I know these guys. A big mouth and that's all."

He couldn't figure out why he hated the kid so much. Something about him got under his skin.

They took the field for the first inning and Beacon was on the hill for the Bears.

It was a cold raw day and Beacon's arm wasn't loose. He walked the first man on four pitched balls.

The next hitter stepped in and Beacon gave him an inside curve. The batter stepped away from it and slammed the ball out toward shortstop. It was a fast

hopper right at Eddie Duncan. He didn't have to move for it. The ball went in his glove and then fell out. He stooped to pick it up and dropped it. He got hold of it again and, turning, fired a throw to second. Jig Clayton was standing there; he leaped high in the air. The ball went over his outstretched fingers and rolled clear to the bullpen before it was retrieved. The runner on first went all the way home and the batter ended up on third with a three-base error.

"Nice going, busher," Jig said. "Let's see you pop off now."

Eddie Duncan's face was white. He glared at Jig, then ran in toward the mound yelling, "My fault, Beacon, old boy. Don't let it get you down."

Beacon whiffed the next hitter and the clean-up slugger took his position at the plate. He picked out a fast ball and a streak of white started out toward left center field.

Eddie Duncan was playing back deep on the edge of the grass. He threw himself into the air, one arm shot skyward, and the ball bulleted into his glove. Before he hit the ground again, Eddie had tossed to Sabo at third to double up the runner and the half inning was over.

The bears ran in to the dugout and Eddie was yelling all the way. "I'll get that run back for you, Beacon, old boy."

He went up to the plate. A fast ball shot in and the kid let the bat go slack in his hands. A bunt trickled down the third base line and the kid streaked for first. The bunt was too hard and the third baseman fired the ball to first. But Eddie Duncan had hit the dirt and one spike hooked the bag. The umpire's hands were palms down.

Sabo went up and bunted on the first pitch. He was out by a city block but Duncan was on second base. Jig Clayton stepped out of the waiting hitters' circle and ambled toward the plate.

He stood there lazily and didn't offer. The count ran to two and two. The ball came in, hugging the outside corner, breaking away. Jig reached out and punched at the ball. There was an opening between first and second and he drilled the ball through there. He loafed down to first and watched Eddie Duncan race around third and roar in to home plate. He slid from ten feet away and he could have scored standing up.

The crowd gave him a yell and the rookie doffed his cap. On first, Jig Clayton sneered. The old grandstand play. The kid took the credit, but it had been Jig's hit that drove him in. Jig shrugged his shoulders. He'd never paid any attention to the fans, he wasn't starting now. As long as he drew his salary, he didn't care whether the fans ever saw him out there. It was the old average that counted when the owners made out the contracts.

The game went on and Beacon was warm now, showing top form. The Bears picked up single runs in the fourth, seventh and eighth and breezed to a win. In the locker room after it was over, Pete Bland grinned from ear to ear.

"We got fire and dash," he said. "This year we roll."

"Three cheers," Jig drawled.

They didn't pay much attention to him. But as the days went by, Jig knew he was having a good year. The Bears were making those twin killings. Eddie Duncan was fast and Jig had to step to keep up with him. Two weeks went by and only the Eagles were ahead of the Bears, a game away.

EDDIE DUNCAN kept riding Jig. One afternoon they lost a ball game in the ninth when Jig couldn't get to a ball. He was a step away and when the grounder went on past his glove, the winning run came in from second.

It wasn't an error, Jig hadn't touched it.

Eddie Duncan said, "You ever try getting that uniform dirty, Clayton? Hit the ground once in a while. It won't hurt you."

Jig said nothing. Some day he was going to have it out with this tramp busher. Under the stands some fine day, he would take this loud mouth apart piece by piece.

The Bears travelled west and opened up a three-day series in the Eagle ball park. This was the first meeting of the top teams in the league. They had a big

crowd out that day and the Eagles were a buccaneering crew of ballplayers.

Right from the start they went to work on Eddie Duncan. They had dug up everything in his past life and they gave it all to the rookie in a raucous chorus, trying to upset him, to get him rattled.

But it didn't last very long. Eddie Duncan went up to lead off and on the bench the Eagle jockeys poured it to him. The Eagle hurler threw the first ball in and if it wasn't a duster, it was the next thing to it. The kid shortstop had to go down into the dirt to get away from it.

He got up and Jig heard him jawing at the pitcher. He didn't move away, he crowded the plate even more. Another close pitch sent him diving back into the dirt. Eddie got up and he looked scared. He backed away from the plate.

"Yellow," Jig Clayton sneered.

"Watch and see," Pete Bland said.

The Eagle pitcher threw a hook on the outside now that Eddie had been backed away. But as soon as the pitch had started, Eddie was up crowding that plate again. His bat lashed out. There was a solid thump and the ball started out toward right field. The fly-catcher went back to the fence, then watched the ball soar over his head into the stands.

"Yellow, is he, Clayton?" Pete Bland said, laughing. "If you had the heart that kid has, Clayton, you'd be the best second baseman in the business, instead of just another good player."

Eddie Duncan came around third and grinned at the Eagle bench. "What's the matter, boys?" he yelled.

The Eagles didn't respond. The jockeying was over then and there.

Mike Sabo flied deep to center and Jig went up there, smarting under Bland's words. The count ran full and on the next pitch, a ball that broke inside, Jig swung and hit an easy grounder to the pitcher.

He went back to the dugout. Eddie Duncan said, "Should have let it go, Clayton."

A vein began to hammer at Jig's temple. He clenched his hands and said nothing.

The Bears won that day and tied for first place. But Jig Clayton wasn't happy about it. He had gone four for none, and his average dropped to three hundred even.

The Bears were hot. They swept the series. They got hits when they needed them and came up with fielding gems when they had to make them to stop the Eagles. But Jig Clayton went to the plate twelve times in the series without getting on base.

The team moved on to play the other western clubs and the slump stayed with Jig Clayton. He began to worry about it. Pete Bland dropped him down into the eighth slot in the batting order. His average had tumbled close to two-fifty. And his fielding was beginning to suffer.

It was that damn rookie, Jig thought. He was responsible.

THE Bears returned home and they were on top. The Eagles came to town hugging their heels, and it was going to be a ding-dong series. The first game was tight all the way. It went into the eighth inning with no score. Jig crouched at his position, thinking that he hadn't been able to get the ball out of the infield all day.

The first Eagle hitter ran out a bunt and was on first. The Bear infield moved in for the sacrifice, and the Eagle manager crossed them up. He went after the first pitch, rifling it between first and second.

Jig went over and got in front of it. He was off balance, then he turned and threw to second. Eddie Duncan was there to get it and the runner from first came in hard, his spikes slicing through the air.

The kid went down in the dust, but when it had cleared away he was still hanging on to the ball. The runner was out at second base. Bears came charging in from all over the field, Pete Bland was out of the dugout on the run. Jig Clayton stood at his position.

"You hurt, kid?" Bland asked.

Eddie Duncan shook his head. "Let's get going." He trotted toward shortstop and the players went back to their positions.

Jig Clayton listened to the hand and

grinned wryly. The old grandstand stuff again. The game went on and the next hitter cracked a ground ball toward second base near the bag. Jig was playing the batter that way; he took the ball, stepped on the sack, and fired to first to complete the double play.

He turned and tossed his glove aside and then hesitated. Down on the ground he saw the thin red film, almost obliterated by the dust now, but he knew what it was. He saw a few more drops on the ground.

He went in toward the dugout and he saw Eddie Duncan trying not to limp. He saw the wet dark stocking clinging to his ankle. And he knew that Eddie Duncan had stayed in there because the Bears were short of good utility men. An injury would break the backs of the Bears.

Jig was still thinking about that when he went up to the plate. He stood there and was called out on strikes. He went back to the dugout. Slattery stepped in and hammered the first pitch over the fence to give the Bears a one-run lead.

The lead held. The Bears went out one, two, three in the ninth and it was another victory, another step toward the flag.

Jig Clayton went back to the hotel. Afterwards, he left the lobby and rode upstairs to the fourth floor. He went down the hall, knocked at a door, and then went inside.

Eddie Duncan sat in the chair, his right leg propped up, a towel tossed over it.

Jig said, "You can cut out the act, Duncan. I know what happened out there today."

Eddie Duncan said, "So what?"

Jig sat down on the edge of the bed and lighted a cigarette. "I've never liked you, Duncan."

The kid said, "That goes double. So what are you doing here?"

"Maybe I'm curious," Jig said.

Eddie Duncan hunched up a little in the chair and the towel fell off his leg. Jig could see the gash made by the spikes across his ankle and the ugly, bruised swelling.

"You wouldn't understand," Eddie Duncan said. "You're not that kind of guy, Clayton. You're the kind of guy, every time you got to bat, you're thinking of your average. You never think about the team, about how you can help win a game. You play them all for Clayton, you've always played them that way. And now I think you better get the hell out."

JIG CLAYTON looked down at him a minute then went outside. He left the hotel and wandered through the streets. He went into a bowling alley to try and forget what was on his mind. Sitting back of the alleys he watched the games. There was a crowd on hand, they were discussing the pennant chances of the Bears. Jig Clayton sat there listening, not taking any part in the conversation.

"That Duncan," someone said. "He's made the team. A spark plug. Keeps 'em on their toes all the time."

There was general assent from the listeners. One man disagreed. He said, "The kid'll crack in the stretch. Wait and see."

They didn't like it, they hopped on the speaker and Jig cut in. He said, "The kid's only hitting two sixty-seven. He makes errors."

"The best man in that infield," the man next to Jig said hotly. "He can make an error an inning and I'll still say so."

Jig said, "A hell of a lot you know about baseball."

He was prepared to leave, but the man he had addressed also got up. He gave Jig a shove, angry and ready for a fight. "Maybe you want to get tough about it, pal."

Jig said, "I know that loud mouthy—"

The man swung on him. Jig connected with a right hand, then he was being held from behind. He didn't say anything. He could feel his hand swelling up. He'd busted a thumb. That was smart, wasn't it, he thought. Jig Clayton, who took care of himself, busting a hand on some guy he'd never seen before. For a guy who played his cards close to his vest, that was certainly dumb.

He thought that he had played it smart all his life. He had money in the bank

and he was doing all right, but he had never made friends on any team he had played with.

A burly cop had come in the alley. "You boys better cool off in night court," he said. He jerked his head at Jig. "What's your name?"

"Clayton," Jig said. "And if you want the Bears to keep on winning you better let me out of here. I got some baseball to play tomorrow."

"Jig Clayton," someone said. "I thought I recognized him."

Jig walked toward the entrance. The man he had exchanged punches with yelled after him, "Why, you punk! You're jealous of the rook, of Eddie Duncan."

Jig looked back somberly. "Maybe I am, pal," he said.

He went outside and walked along the streets. He had lost track of time, but he knew it was late when he got back to the hotel. He went in the lobby and Pete Bland was at the desk.

He looked at his watch and then at Jig. His face flushed angrily. "The toughest series we've had all year and you pick this night to break training. One hundred bucks, Clayton."

Jig said, "Well, you can't take it with you," and headed for the elevators.

WALKING out on the field the next day, Jig listened to the yells that greeted Eddie Duncan. He knew he couldn't ever be like Duncan, some guys had color and some didn't. But he thought that was one reason he'd never liked the rookie. He'd been jealous, a veteran jealous of a busher. It didn't make much sense.

Jig went out to second base, holding his right hand so no one could get a good look at his taped thumb. It didn't hurt now, but he wondered how it would feel to make a throw. He wasn't long in finding out.

The first batter, a southpaw, dragged a bunt past the mound. It was a little too hard and Jig was after it like a cat. He scooped it up in his bare hand, the thumb forgotten. And then as he started to throw, he winced and the ball went into the dirt. Slattery stopped it with his body, but the batter was on base and a few catcalls came from the stands.

Out at shortstop Eddie Duncan started to jabber.

"Shut up and play ball," Jig snapped. He walked in a little toward Roper on the mound. "It's all right, Lefty," he said, "we'll get two for you."

The runner danced off first, a fast man, the runner who had spiked Eddie Duncan the day before. And this time the Eagles tried to bunt. It was a short one, out in front of the plate, and the catcher crashed out, picked it up and snapped a peg across the diamond on a line a foot above the ground.

Jig was at second base to take it. The runner came in, wicked-looking spikes cutting at Jig. The veteran pulled an inch away from them and pinned the ball to the runner's legs. Jig's elbow fluttered a little and caught the runner on the side of the head. He landed like a ton of bricks and then got up fast.

Jig said, "You play rough, sonny, that's what you get."

The runner turned to the umpire. "You see what he done?"

"I saw," the umpire said grimly. "And I also saw you spike Duncan yesterday. Now button your lip and go back to the bench, or get out of the game."

Eddie Duncan, at shortstop, stared hard at Jig Clayton. For once he didn't seem to have anything to say.

"Someday," Jig drawled, "I'll show you how to make that pivot without getting spiked."

He went back to second base. The batter hit one right at him. He flipped to Duncan and the shortstop fired to first to end the inning.

They went in for their bats and Eddie Duncan limped a little. He drew a walk and Pete Bland called Sabo back to the dugout, ordered him to bunt.

"Make it good, Mike," Jig spoke up from the corner where he was sitting. "The kid's got a bad ankle. He didn't let you know about it because he knows we need him. But he won't be able to run too fast."

Mike went up there. They knew he was going to bunt, but it didn't do them any

good. He laid it perfectly down the third base line and there was only one play to make. Sabo was thrown out at first and Eddie Duncan perched on second.

Jig went up there and gripped the bat. He couldn't get his right thumb around it. He looked at Duncan on second and watched the pitch come in. He tried to swing hard and sent a looping foul into the stands. Another pitch cut the corner for a strike, and then the pitcher wasted a couple. Jig didn't bite. He moved a little closer to the plate, and an outside hook hung on the edge. Jig punched at it, drilling it between first and second. He loped down to first and Eddie Duncan came across.

Jig was thinking of the run that had scored. It was a couple of minutes before he realized that he had finally gotten a hit and broken out of his batting slump.

He died on first and went to his position. The first batter laced a ball deep to his left. He knew he couldn't get it, but he went over anyway, cutting back to the grass and throwing himself at the ball. It hit his glove and rolled away.

He got up and he thought he would get an error on it. He walked slowly back toward second. Eddie Duncan yelled shrilly, "Nice try in there, Jig. You looked like Joe Gordon on that one."



THE Eagles got the runaround and it was a tie ball game. The innings went along and it was tight. Neither club could score.

They came into the last of the eighth with no change, and Jig knew the Bear pitcher was tiring. He wouldn't be able to go extra innings.

Jig was leading off. He hit the first ball, a slow roller to deep short and just beat it out. Big Slattery went up there to swing and struck out. Shafer flied to left and there were two gone.

The batter stepped in and Jig took a long lead. There was a crack and the ball went over Jig's head. He started for sec-

ond, and as he came in toward the bag, he was waved on to third. Without slackening speed, he raced ahead and then Bland by third base held up his hands to stop.

Jig twisted his head for a look at the ball. With two gone he knew the Eagles would pass the seventh hitter and get at catcher Rayburn. He was a good backstop, but he couldn't hit this pitcher with an ironing board.

Jig ignored the stop sign, tramped on third and started down the last ninety feet toward home plate.

The throw was coming in from deep right field. Out of the corner of his eye Jig saw the second baseman take it, whirl, and fire in to the plate. The catcher set himself. And at the same moment Jig saw the ball coming in. He dove headlong at the catcher. They went down together and Jig found the plate with one hand. The dust cleared and he saw the ball rolling away from the catcher.

As Jig had expected, the catcher struck out. But the Bears had a precious one run lead. Pete Bland said, "You disobeyed orders. I oughtta fine you fifty." He grinned a little. "But I ain't gonna do it. I never knew you could run that fast, Clayton."

"Maybe I never knew it myself," Jig said.

He went out for the first of the ninth and the thumb was sore, getting worse all the time. The Bear pitcher was tired, his control shaky. He got one man, then loaded up the sacks.

Pete Bland called time and came out to the mound for a conference. The members of the infield huddled around the hurler.

"I got to go with you, Lefty," Pete said. "We'll gamble on the double play. Come in three steps." He looked anxiously at Eddie Duncan. "I want this game. How's the leg, Eddie?"

"The leg will hold up," Eddie said. "What I'm worried about is Jig's thumb. Have a look."

Pete Bland's eyes turned glassy when he saw it. Jig grinned at him. "With both of us crippled, " he said, "it's still the best double play combine in the league. Let's take 'em."

They ran back to position. Lefty Roper threw two bad ones then evened the count. He sent the next one in, a fast curve at the knees, and the batter rifled it between short and third.

Eddie Duncan drifted over in front of it. He was off balance, he twisted and the throw was off the bag to the right. Jig Clayton, tramping on the sack, threw out his bare hand. The ball stuck there. He gritted his teeth, turned and snapped the throw to first into Slattery's glove for the out and the end of the game.

Jig and Eddie Duncan walked off the field together. "I gave you a terrific ride this year," Eddie said. "I don't blame you if you want to pop me one."

"With this hand," Jig said, "I couldn't do it. Besides, I don't fight guys on my team."

They grinned at each other and went up the clubhouse steps.



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WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT?

The Punch Professor

By C. Paul Jackson

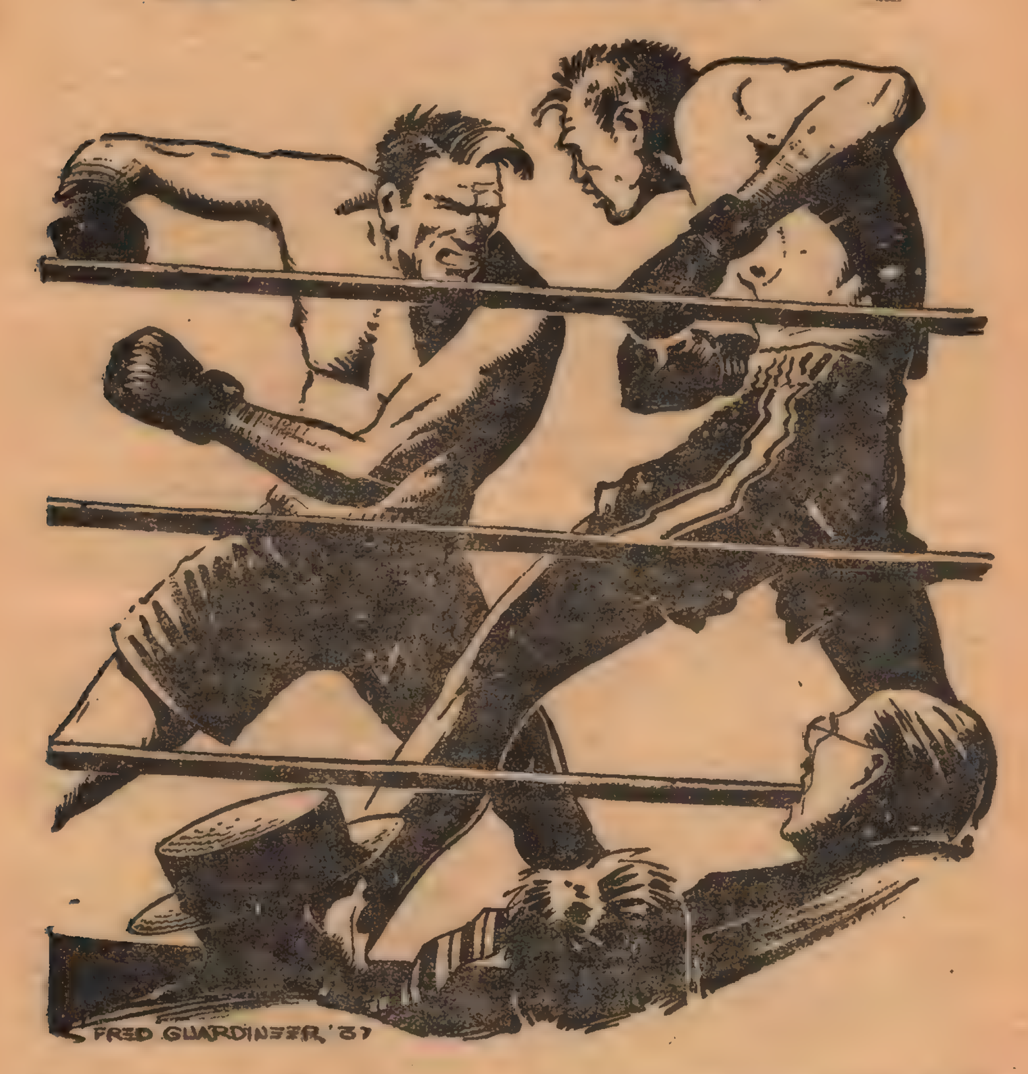


Smashing Fight Novelet

CHAPTER I

MATHEW ROURKE BRIAN, Ph.D., lifted his weight from the deep leather chair in Faculty Lounge of the Ruxford College Men's Union. He did not look as though he had any right in Faculty Lounge. He looked too young to hold a Doctor of Philosophy degree and the solid one-ninety-two pounds he packed on a wide-shouldered, lean-hipped, six-one frame did not loan him the appearance of a college professor. He looked more like an athlete in the

Matty Rourke may have been a college professor but he knew how to handle his fists. Or so he thought until that heavyweight pug leaned a duke on Matty's jaw. Then Matty found himself working his way through a leather-pusher's college headed by a dean of double-cross slugging.



pink of condition; say a young heavyweight fighter with physical promise of being on the way up.

"Calling Battler Alders. Calling Battler Alders."

A uniformed Union attendant softly droned the monotonous chant as Mathew Rourke Brian came to the arcway of Faculty Lounge. The page never turned his head toward the lounge. Naturally no one known as Battler anything would ever be found in the Lounge. Mathew Rourke Brian started through the arch.

"His-s-st! This way, Battler!"

The big fellow looked down, a little startled, at the small wiry man who grasped his arm and jerked. The little man's dark eyes flicked a look of mingled apprehension and disgust at Mathew Rourke Brian.

"You punch-drunk, Battler? By Judas!"

The face of the man tugging at Mathew Rourke Brian wrinkled in a worried scowl. He glared sidewise over a humped and crooked nose while he snaked Brian away from Faculty Lounge.

"The faculty big-wigs ever find out I had anything to do with a common pug desecratin' their holy-of-holies, they'll have a lower opinion of Spike Babb than they got now! Why, they'd even throw me outa there—and the boxin' coach ought to rate a kinda step-brother faculty standing. I been havin' you paged for twenty minutes. How'd you happen to—"

Spike Babb broke off suddenly because Mathew Rourke Brian stopped and firmly removed the hand tugging at his sleeve. An amused twinkle was in Brian's pleasant brown eyes and a grin suddenly broke across his broad face. He ran the long fingers of a big hand through the crisp curly hair that was neither light nor dark but just brown, looked down at Spike Babb.

"Evidently you have made a mistake in identity, Mr. Babb."

"What do you mean?" Spike Babb jerked his gaze to the bigger man. "Get this, Alders; This is the first time I'm face to face with you, and I want to tell you that in my book you and the guy shoving you both stink. B. J. Benson swings a heavy drag around here and he jammed you down my throat for the headliner of our ring show, but I ain't playin' fall guy for nona your squirrelly publicity stunts. You got any notion you can pull the funny stuff on Spike Babb, get it outa your nut. You ain't gonna—"

Babb broke off short, peered sharply at Mathew Rourke Brian and his eyes widened.

"By Judas! You *ain't* Battler Alders!"

"You are correct. I certainly am not Battler Alders."

"Tab me for a cockeyed ring-post!" Babb groaned. "I can see you ain't—now. You got the same build and the Battler is sportin' the quiet tweeds like you're wearin' in his newest gag, but—say, you look like him in the face, too."

The little boxing coach shrugged, tried to cover his blunder.

"I pulled a bull, I guess, but I still done you a favor, lad. You go bargin' in the Lounge, you'll run into grief. Students ain't allowed in Faculty Lounge."

"I'm not a student, Mr. Babb." The big man ran his fingers through his hair again, grinned a little self-consciously. "My name is Brian. I am to be on the staff of the Mathematics Department."

He glanced at his strap watch. It was five to three and he had an appointment at three with the president of exclusive Ruxford College—to be officially welcomed as Assistant Professor of Mathematics. The army had already deferred him for this purpose, as they considered mathematics all-important. More to make parting conversation than anything else, he said:

"A new faculty member shouldn't be late for an appointment with the head man, either. The office of the president is in Administration Hall, isn't it?"

"Yeah." Spike Babb nodded. "Down the street a coupla blocks."

His gaze flicked over Mathew Rourke Brian again. A kind of puzzlement was in Babb's eyes.

"By Judas," he said. "You sure look like Alders and you remind me of somebody else, too. Can't put my finger on it right now, but— Say, you ain't pullin' my leg, fella? You ain't some bird happens to look some like Alders that he sent down here? That's about Alders' idea of somethin' clever to get him in the papers or—"

"Believe me, Mr. Babb, I am no pugilist nor am I an impersonator. I never heard of Battler Alders." Mathew Rourke Brian grinned that wide grin again, made a friendly gesture with his hand, "Perhaps I'll see you around and you can tell me how you come out in your search for the elusive boxer."

BRIAN swung up the wide steps of Administration Hall. He did not see the well-dressed, paunch-bellied man just inside the massive glass doors look sharply at him and give a signal to a husky pair outside. One of the pair sauntered

toward the steps and the other with a camera slung over his shoulder followed. As Mathew Rourke Brian reached the broad landing at the top, the man without the camera crashed full tilt into him.

The young professor staggered backwards off-balance, barely saved himself from tumbling down the steps.

"Watch where you're goin'," a voice snarled.

Mathew Rourke Brian jerked startled gaze to the man who had bumped him. He looked into a scowling face that was cruel and vicious. He was about the same build as the young professor and wore a tweed suit that probably cost twice as much as the forty dollar ready-to-wear tweeds Brian wore, yet he didn't look right. The suit was well cut enough, but it just didn't fit psychologically.

For a second's fraction quick anger flared in the depths of Brian's brown eyes. The fellow had a nerve, barging into a man, then intimating that he was the aggrieved party. Then Brian remembered that he was Dr. Mathew Rourke Brian, almost a professor. College professors didn't lose their tempers and get involved in public brawls.

"I beg your pardon," he said quietly. "I'm sure I didn't mean to—"

"What's that you say!" The man who had bumped into Brian talked in a loud voice. He glowered at the professor. "Listen, bozo, you ain't gettin' away with talk like that. You're pokin' your nose out for a biff and you're gonna get it. Perfesser or whatever, you can't talk like that!"

Mathew Rourke Brian stared at the man in puzzled amazement. Was the fellow mad?

"I don't understand, sir. I merely said I beg your—"

"No dirty Nazi so-and-so talks like that to Battler Alders! You asked for it!"

Contemptuously, casually, Battler Alders jabbed out with a straight left to Brian's face. It didn't land. Instinctively the young professor jerked his head aside and the Battler's fist whizzed harmlessly past Brian's ear.

Mathew Rourke Brian didn't plan the next sequence of the crazy scene. Afterward, except for the high-speed lens of a press photographer's camera, he would have denied that he actually did what the picture Tim McCarty showed him proved.

The follow-through of Battler Alders' left jab carried him into Brian. Without conscious volition, as though a deep-rooted instinct caused him to do the perfect thing, Mathew Rourke Brian cracked a right uppercut to Alders' face. The blow travelled less than a foot.

Whomp!

Brian's fist crunched through flesh to bone. The Battler's head snapped back and the power of that paralyzing jolt to his jaw staggered him. An odd disbelief flickered briefly in the dark eyes of Battler Alders, then a glassy haze veiled the orbs. He swayed, nearly retained his balance, then half-pitched, half-stumbled to the cement of the landing.

Mathew Rourke Brian was dimly aware that a flash-bulb flared. The second man with Alders was feverishly screwing another bulb into his holder.

"Boy, what a wallop!" he mumbled. "What a picture! Nineteen pugs can't dump the Battler off his pins, and this college-looking guy scythes 'im with one sock! What a shot!"

Tim McCarty, ex-pug himself, ex-sports writer, and now press cameraman for the *Ruxford Chronicle*, dashed around Brian and the sprawled Alders and another flash-bulb flared.

Battler Alders was dazed plenty. He got to one knee and shook his head like a wet puppy. Some of the fog must have cleared. He looked up at Mathew Rourke Brian and abruptly full comprehension came into the Battler's eyes. He scrambled erect.

"Why, you dirty Nazi—!" Filthy curses poured from Battler Alders. His face was a snarling fury. "Bust me when I ain't lookin', huh! Okay, you're lookin' for trouble and you're gonna get it!"

"Are you mad, man! I am not looking for trouble. I did not hit you when—"

A STINGING, twisting jab from Battler Alders slapped against the side of his face and broke off the professor's protest. This time there was nothing casual or contemptuous about Alders. A

sharp right-cross slashed Brian in the mouth. He tasted the salt of blood from a cut lip.

Mathew Rourke Brian forgot all about college professors not becoming involved in brawls. His brown eyes gleamed hard and cold. He slipped a second left jab, stepped inside the looping right Battler Alders threw, and again that short jolting right flashed incredibly fast.

Battler Alders was a professional fighter and he didn't make the same mistake twice. His left arm had jerked down to cover after the jab, but even so the kick of the young professor's wallop drove the Battler's forearm against his jaw hard enough to jerk his head back.

"Paste 'im, kid! Mow 'im down!"

Another flash-bulb popped. Tim McCarty danced excitedly around the battling pair, unaware that he yelled encouragement to the Battler's opponent. Brian followed the dynamite right uppercut with a sharp left hook. It landed high on the cheek of Battler Alders and left a dull red crimson mark.

But the best amateur battler can be no match for a good professional. Battler Alders snarled curses, but he kept his head. He had a wholesome respect for that murderous right after two tastes of it. He flicked stinging jabs and bruising hooks into the face of Brian and danced out of reach.

A hard right smashed on the bridge of Brian's nose and blood cascaded down onto his shirt front and coat. A twisting hook broke open the flesh below Brian's eye.

Mathew Rourke Brian could barely see for a moment. But he stood there like a real fighting man and flailed away. His right grazed the Battler's jaw, smashed up and across his face. Claret spouted from the Battler's nose.

He snarled a vicious curse, feinted a left, and when Brian jerked away, Alders put everything he had into a right cross.

Mathew Rourke Brian felt as though something inside his brain exploded and he was suddenly walking in a thick hazy fog. There was no bottom to it, a man couldn't walk.

"Get the picture, McCarty," a heavy voice said.

Funny place to be taking pictures, Brian thought. He was vaguely conscious that he was down. A ring of faces cut through the murky haze in his brain and they spun crazily around for a moment. He struggled to rise. His jaw ached. His whole being ached. There was something he had to do and there wasn't much time. He—

Abruptly his head cleared and he remembered the appointment with Ruxford College president. Then the whole fantastic business came back. Somebody grasped his arm. He jerked away and the big red-faced man in the blue of a policeman grabbed him again.

"Let me go. I've got to—"

"You've got to shut up!" the cop cut in grimly. "I'd best take him in, Mr. Benson. I saw most of it, saw him knock the Battler down. Alders can make charges and—"

"The Battler will press no charges," a heavy voice cut in. "Battler Alders only did what any red-blooded American would have done. However, it is fortunate that you saw this man's unprovoked attack. Some crackpots think it's smart to take a wallop at a figure as important in the fistic scene as Battler Alders. All we want is no bad publicity."

"There'll be no kick-back on the Battler," the cop said. He gave Mathew Rourke Brian a shove. "And I don't think this lad will start something again 'less he knows he can finish it. Get goin', you. On your way 'fore I run you'se in!"

CHAPTER II

HE LOOKED into the mirror above the dresser. He was a sorry-looking specimen. One eye was beautifully colored and enhanced by a strip of court-plaster over the cut below it. His nose was swollen and his lower lip was puffed and raw inside where his teeth had cut through. But rough as was the reflection that looked back at him from the mirror, it was smooth and velvety compared to the turmoil inside Mathew Rourke Brian.

What had happened to him? The thing

just didn't make sense. Why should a perfect stranger suddenly attack him like a madman and everybody treat him like a leper? He picked up a typed note from the dresser. At the top was a printed letterhead: *Office of the President, Ruxford College.* Brian read it for the twentieth time.

Sir:

Confirming the message given you over the phone by my secretary, this is to inform you officially that any connection Ruxford College may have contemplated with you is irrevocably severed. You must realize that Ruxford cannot be associated with a man such as precipitated the affair in which you were involved this afternoon.

Please refrain from attempting to communicate further in any way with this office. The matter is officially closed.

Yours truly,
JONATHAN B. RICE
President, Ruxford College.

The note had been delivered to Brian an hour ago by special messenger. He had phoned the office of the president immediately upon reaching his room after the brawl and explained that he had been accidentally delayed. He asked for an appointment later. After some delay, a feminine voice informed him that the president was not interested in arranging another appointment and broke the connection. When Brian attempted to reach the president himself, he was informed that Ruxford's head man wanted no part of him.

Mathew Rourke Brian flung the note back on the table. He ran the fingers of one hand despairingly through the crinkly brown hair of his head and a bleak tightness was in his eyes. Little bunches of muscle bulged along the long slope of his jaw. He didn't intend to take this thing lying down. The trouble was, where to start?

The rap of knuckles on his door broke off Brian's train of thought. He opened the door. Spike Babb and a big slouchy man stood in the hall. The wiry little boxing coach said:

"Can we come in, Brian? This is Tim McCarty, he's a newspaperman. We got something we want to go over with you."

Tim McCarty was a big blockhouse of a man with shaggy sandy hair and nine thousand freckles dotted over his broad face. He affected a slouchy carriage and looked soft, but the grip he gave Brian as they shook hands belied the flabby appearance. He had keen gray eyes and they surveyed the young professor thoroughly.

Brian said, "Come in. Newspapermen know what goes on, don't they, Mr. McCarty? Perhaps you can give me some idea of what has happened to me."

Tim McCarty eyed him curiously, shrugged.

"I figured *you* could tell me what goes on," he said. He pulled a folded newspaper from his pocket, added, "Have you seen this?"

IT WAS the night's copy of the *Ruxford Chronicle.* A two-column cut was above a story headed: *Battler Alders Addles Nazi Sympathizer.* The picture showed Mathew Rourke Brian dazedly pushing himself to his feet with Battler Alders standing over him. Brian read the story beneath the picture:

Battler Adlers, in town for the annual ring show sponsored by Ruxford College Athletic Association, this afternoon performed a service for Ruxford College and Ruxford community. According to Alders—and his account of the affair is corroborated by B. J. Benson, prominent restauranteur and member of Ruxford College Board—Alders was descending the steps of Administration Hall when he was rudely bumped by a man later identified as Dr. Mathew Rourke Brian. Brian was on his way to an appointment with Dr. Rice regarding a professional positon on the college staff.

It is alleged by Alders that Brian snarled an insult to Alders when Alders attempted a courteous apology although he did not feel that he was at fault. Brian allegedly said, "When our New Order comes to America, louts of your character will not brush aside college professors!"

Alders thought he had misunderstood, but Brian is alleged to have continued in the same vein, "Hitler's New Order will put American swine in their place!"

Battler Alders, like all men in the public eye as a professional boxer, is constantly badgered by men who think it is a badge of something or other to insult and even swing on a fighter. He hesitated to take action be-

cause he thought Brian was such a crackpot. But in the words of Alders to this reporter, "I ain't in khaki yet, but nobody can say no dirty Nazi tongue on America when Battler Alders is there, so I let him have one. The lug tried to fight back—I'll give 'im that—so I had to clip him a couple of real ones."

It is understood that no charges will be made against Brian, but Dr. Rice emphatically stated that any possible relation between Ruxford College and Brian were unthinkable.

A *Chronicle* cameraman just happened to be on the scene and obtained the above picture which . . .

"That 'just happened to be on the scene' line is pure baloney," Tim McCarty said. "I'll tell you about that in a minute. What about it, doc?"

"It's the most fantastic tissue of lies I can imagine," Brian said. He told them briefly what had actually passed between him and Battler Alders. "That is the absolute truth."

Tim McCarty nodded.

"I was with Alders and I didn't hear anything like he claims in this story. The thing stinks, and I told the boss so when he didn't print the other shots I got. He fired me when I refused to turn over the plates. Somebody knew what was coming off when I was assigned to stick with Alders and got a shot of anything interesting."

McCarty eyed the youthful Ph.D. a space, suddenly said, "What did you ever do to B. J. Benson? Any reason why he'd be after your scalp?"

"I never heard of the man. I wouldn't know him if I saw him."

"Benson is a big-shot around here. Plenty big. And for my dough, Benson is behind this smelly setup."

McCarty reached into the inside pocket of his coat and brought out two pictures. One showed the head of Battler Alders snapping back from the jarring right uppercut Brian had landed, and the other showed the Battler sprawled flat. In the background of the second picture was a well-dressed, full-faced man. His suit did not conceal the paunch of his belly.

"That's Benson." McCarty pointed to the man in the background. "Know him?"

"I never saw him in my life."

Tim McCarty looked at Spike Babb, shrugged.

"Okay, Spike, I'm satisfied. Looks like there must be something in the angle you've got. It's squirrelly sounding, but —give it to the doc and let's see what he says."

SPIKE BABB looked off across the room a moment, then he looked searchingly into the face of Mathew Rourke Brian.

"I knowed this afternoon when I glimmed you in Faculty Lounge that you reminded me of someone. Then tonight when Tim brought me that newspaper yarn and I read your full name—well, maybe it is squirrelly like Tim says, but you oughta be able to set me straight whether it's off the beam or not."

Spike Babb drew a long breath and began:

"Twenty-two years ago it was, when Jack Dempsey was in his prime and Tex Rickard held off the big fights until he built 'em into million dollar gates. Mind, I don't say that the man I'm telling about could have taken the Manassa Mauler, but I'm saying that he had the potential stuff to give any man he stepped into the ring with a great battle.

"He was a big rugged black-haired Irishman and he loved to fight. He came out of the West and stood the Eastern heavyweights on their ears. He won ten straight fights and eight of 'em was K.O.'s. He carried dynamite in both fists, but he had the hardest right I ever saw—and I've seen Joe Louis, too."

The little boxing coach scowled even at a memory.

"This big Irisher was set for the big stuff, maybe even a shot at Dempsey's title, when the thing happened. He fought a palooka by name of Killer Birk in the Garden, and this Killer Birk didn't have no business in the same ring. By Judas! He went by-bye in the second minute of the first round, a clean knockout from a short right to the solar plexus that maybe travelled eight inches. I was at the ringside and I saw it.

"But the Killer Birk crowd yelled foul, claimed the shot was low. There was a hubbub in the papers, and two nights after the fight Killer Birk came into the restaurant owned by the big Irisher and began calling dirty names. Well, the Irishman's wife and two-year-old son was there and he tried to soft-pedal Birk so there wouldn't be trouble. Birk wouldn't listen. He dared his conqueror to come out in the alley."

Babb stopped a space. His wrinkled face was somber.

"They went outside and in a minute or two the Irishman came back in. Next day he was arrested and charged with manslaughter. Killer Birk had been found in the alley that morning, dead. His skull was fractured. The Irisher's trainer had gone outside with him and witnessed the fight. He told the newspaper boys that his man had knocked Birk down with a clean sock to the jaw and gone back to his wife and kid. Birk got up after a bit and walked away under his own power.

"The trainer thought he heard Birk and someone arguing at the mouth of the alley; he hadn't investigated, knowing Birk was drunk and in quarrelsome mood. But he was positive that Birk had received no fractured skull from the sock to the jaw.

"Two days before the trial, the trainer mysteriously disappeared, and without his testimony, the jury brought in a verdict of guilty against the Irishman. The sentence was five to fifteen years."

Spike Babb held the gaze of Mathew Rourke Brian, added slowly:

"Terry Brian was the trainer's name. No one in the boxing game ever heard of him again. The man who was railroaded for manslaughter was Mat Rourke, probably Mathew was his whole name. And except for your hair being brown, you look like him, lad. Mathew Rourke Brian. By Judas! Coincidence don't go so far as you havin' a handle like that!"

"You—you mean you think—that is, you are intimating that I—"

"I think you're Mat Rourke's kid." Babb cut through the other's stammer. "How old are you, lad?"

"Twenty-four," Brian said absently. His forehead was wrinkled and an odd gleam was in his eyes. He muttered, "Terry Brian. Uncle Terry." Suddenly he looked at Spike Babb.

"I never knew my parents. They—they died when I was very young. Uncle Terry Brian raised me. He never spoke much about my parents."

"Mat Rourke was killed in a prison uprising," Babb said. "Less than a year after he was sent up. He tried to hold back a mob storming the prison yard guards and some con stabbed him to death. I don't know about Mrs. Rourke. They say she died of a broken heart when all efforts she made to clear Mat failed."

A little silence held the room. It was broken by the younger man.

"It is possible that you are correct, Babb," he said. "I can understand why Uncle Terry might have kept the true facts of my immediate ancestry from me. Uncle Terry was gored by a bull on the farm, two years ago, and died before I could get home, but he left a box of papers. I've never had occasion to use it, but I'm sure my birth certificate is in that box. It will not be difficult to check. Assuming that I am Mathew Rourke, Jr., I fail to see where any light is shed on Battler Alders' attack and lying story to the newspaper."

Spike Babb said, "That's where B. J. Benson comes in. Benson was Mat Rourke's manager. They were in together on the restaurant; the money undoubtedly came from purses Mat Rourke earned. Shortly after Mat's trial, Benson opened a second restaurant. The angle I see is that Benson gypped Mrs. Rourke out of Mat's share of the restaurants and went on to build the famous Benson Restaurant chain. If that's true, he'd be jittery of anyone named Mathew Rourke being near him.

"Benson's on the Ruxford College Board, he'd know when the president sent your name before the board for confirmation. Only he had to make it look like it wasn't him that got rid of you. Mathew Rourke Brian means something to Benson and—"

"What better way of queering you than

he took?" Tim McCarty cut in. "It adds up. Benson would get some nice publicity for that ham-and-egger he's giving a build-up and he'd cook your goose. Anything Nazi is poison right now and—well, Benson controls the *Chronicle*, too. That explains the angle of me being sent with Alders to get anything interesting."

The young professor ran his fingers through his hair.

"It is utterly fantastic," he said, "but somehow I feel it is true. If it is, Mr. Benson and Battler Alders are going to learn that they have started something!"

CHAPTER III

FOUR months after that night, young Matty Rourke sat in a dressing room of a small fight club. He was a magnificent specimen of finely trained athlete, the product of weeks of sweat, work and a driving determination that forced his mind and body to absorb fistic teaching like a sponge.

He had found his birth certificate in the box Terry Brian left, and he'd found more. There were yellowed clippings and a faded closely spaced letter Terry Brian had written many years before. It began:

"Someday you will read this, Matty, and know what a snivelling fear-ridden coward I am. Maybe someday I'll even get up courage to tell you myself . . ."

The letter had told how Terry Brian had got wind of someone who knew how killer Birk really had met death. Terry had nosed around and he must have come close because on a night two days before the trial, he was seized in a room where he'd been decoyed by a promise of locating the man he sought, and beaten half to death. Then he had been dumped into a freight car and when he came to consciousness, he was in the hospital in a city a thousand miles distant.

He'd hovered for weeks at the point of death. After he recovered sufficiently, he'd returned East, located Mrs. Rourke, and they'd taken up the trail of the man Terry was sure could clear Mat Rourke. But again he had been beaten and this time he was warned that if he didn't get the hell out of there and stay out, he would be killed.

The second fearful beating broke Terry's nerve. Mrs. Rourke was taken ill; and he fled with her and Mat Rourke's boy to a farm in a midwestern state. The letter had ended:

"I can't tell you the name of the man who could clear your father's name, I only know that there was such a man. I have always had the hunch that Ben Benson knows more about the dirty frame-up of Mat Rourke than he admits.

"Your mother's last words were for me to raise you so you would never know the rottenness of the fight game which ruined your father, and I have respected her request. Maybe I have been wrong, Matty. Maybe it is best that you know. Certain it is that you can be as proud of your dad as any son because Mat Rourke was innocent of any crime . . ."

Mathew Rourke went back to Ruxford after reading that letter. He showed the letter to Spike Babb and Tim McCarty, said quite simply:

"I need help. You are a boxing coach, Mr. Babb, you used to be a fighter I want you to teach me to fight. B. J. Benson is backing Battler Alders, you say, and I am going to get at them. My career as a teacher is ruined and aside from that, I am determined to root up evidence that will clear my father's name. I have figured out that the most feasible way to get at Benson and Alders is through the boxing ring."

Spike Babb and Tim McCarty had worked with the youngster. After a week, McCarty said:

"You're a natural, doc. I threw some leather in my time and I've seen all the best. You've got what it takes. You need smoothing, experience, but you've got it. I'm climbing on your wagon right now."

Spike Babb said, "Why wouldn't he be a natural? Mat Rourke's kid couldn't be anything else. And that right the lad's got! By Judas, I ain't seen nothin' like it since Mat Rourke himself!"

Young Matty Rourke thought of all this there in the dressing room. His face was tense and set and the lips of his wide

mouth were tight. In front of him was the sports sheet of an evening paper:

Club fighters usually do not rate much space but tonight at East Side Sporting Club, a man who does merit a line or two makes his ring debut. Matty Rourke, the scion of another Rourke of the twenties, will step out against Buck Dowe.

We don't know how many guns Rourke carries nor what caliber they are, but we remember seeing big Mat Rourke in action—and he was a fighter. Big Mat went out under a cloud. We wonder if the cloud will loom so big around this young Matty Rourke that it will blot out his fistic light . . .

Matty Rourke ran his tongue over dry lips. He'd made no effort to hide the fact that he was Mat Rourke's son. He was proud of it. He'd dropped the Brian from his name the day he learned the truth. He'd gone to the University where he had earned his degrees and paid for his new diplomas, seen to it that the records read, Mathew Rourke, Jr.

He was proud to go into the ring as Mat Rourke's kid. It was the first step in his drive to erase the cloud from Mat Rourke's name. Spike Babb came in, glanced sharply at the young fighter.

"Well, this is it, lad," he said. "This is the start. I've taught you all I could but there's some things you'll have to learn in the ring. This boy Buck Dowe is no pushover. He's not a Fancy-Dan nor he ain't strictly a slugger. He's just a run-of-the-mill club fighter, but he can absorb plenty of punches and keep throwing them back. Don't get careless. Keep throwing leather all the time, but wait for an opening for the right. Then tab him."

"I'll throw plenty of leather," Matty said quietly. "Every punch I throw from now on is aimed at Battler Alders and B. J. Benson. Alders is the one I want. The quicker I wade through these tryout fighters, the sooner I get Alders! I'll tab Dowe, all right."

SPIKE BABB fluttered about Matty like a fussy little terrier pup as they went down the aisle. They got a nice greeting from the crowd and it warmed Matty. As they were about to climb into the ring, Tim McCarty grasped Matty's arm.

"Hold it a minute, doc," Tim said. His big face was flushed with anger and his eyes were gray pinpoints.

"We've been jobbed, Spike," he said to Babb. "I smelled something, but they were cute enough to cover it to the last minute. They claim Buck Dowe is sick, can't fight. They've rung in Rocky Stone as a substitute!"

Spike Babb came as near swearing as he ever did.

"*Rocky Stone!* By Judas, the lad ain't ready for no battler as tough as Stone! They can't do it! We refuse to go on, get the promoter! They ain't—"

"We are not refusing to go on," Matty Rourke interrupted quietly.

"But Rocky Stone is high up on the list, lad! He's about the last trial horse for a heavy before he hits the big time! He's 'way, 'way too experienced for your first fight!"

Tim McCarty said, "It's Benson. Rocky Stone is owned by one of the Benson clique and this promoter must be in with them. They're figuring to stop you before you get started."

"Fine." Matty's tone was still unruffled. "I must be on the right track if Benson is that scared of me." He climbed into the ring. "It's all right, Spike. Rocky Stone doesn't look too terrifying to me. Let's go."

Rocky Stone was well named. He was a barrel-chested man with a stubble of black beard covering his face, and short stubby black hair bristling on a bullet head that seemed set directly on his thick shoulders without benefit of a neck. He stalked flat-footedly across the ring and his powerful hairy arms dangled to his knees. He looked like a hunk of man hewed from discolored stone.

The referee called them to the center of the ring. Rocky Stone glowered at the clean-cut streamlined youngster, sneered:

"A pretty boy, huh! I don't like your looks, fella!"

Matty Rourke eyed Rocky Stone silently. Stone's crack did not bother him. Spike and Tim had warned him that a favorite old dodge of fighters was to try to talk a man's goat loose. Matty listened to the instructions.

"You men should know the rules," the ref growled. "I want a good clean fight, but plenty of action. I'm warning you to keep it clean. These fans don't go for dirt. Shake hands and come out fighting at the gong."

Rocky Stone threw another jibe at Matty as they touched gloves.

"Big Mat Rourke's brat, huh! Well, you ain't out in no alley where your pal can sap a man from behind like your old man did!"

For just a second's fraction hot rage seethed inside Matty. He'd show the so-and-so. He'd drive that taunt back behind Stone's teeth! He'd—

"Steady does it, lad." It was Spike Babb taking the robe from his shoulders. "I heard that crack and I know it hurts. But stay smart, lad. It's blood and leather that counts in a fight, not words. Rocky Stone is ringwise, tough and tricky. Watch 'im every minute. Box 'im till you get onto his style."

Matty was abruptly cool and calm. So that was the line they were going to follow, was it? He flexed his muscles, scuffed his shoes in the rosin. An odd flutteriness was in the pit of his stomach yet inside he strained against an eagerness.

THE clang of the bell drove the jittery feeling from Matty Rourke. He raised his gloved fists and danced lightly from his corner. There was co-ordination and grace about his movements that were beautiful. In the center of the ring, he circled cagily, remembered Babb's advice to box Stone until he saw something of his style.

Rocky Stone didn't figure things that way. He had a job to do and there was no use wasting time. He tramped stolidly forward, waded straight at Matty. A stinging left jab bounced off Stone's whiskers and he didn't even blink. Matty stuck the left into the scowling face again. Stone's head bobbed and Matty's fist slid harmlessly off that round bullet head, then Rocky Stone was charging, pouring leather, shooting for a quick kill.

Matty Rourke learned then what Spike Babb meant when he said there were some things a man could only learn in the ring.

Stone threw a looping right and Matty stepped inside it, blocked a hard left, but he was carried against the ropes. He tried to clinch and Stone's elbow cracked across the bridge of his nose. Stone's shoulder rammed under his chin; he shoved Matty back and put all he had into a sock to the breadbasket as he jerked free.

Matty Rourke was hurt. Water filmed his eyes from that elbow foul and his belly felt like a trip-hammer had exploded against it. Rocky Stone stepped back to measure Matty for the finish. But Matty had the instinct of a born fighter. He saw the opening when Stone jerked free and took it. He weaved, sidestepped, dodged away from the ropes.

The haymaker right Stone brought up from the basement was wild, missed a foot, Rocky Stone snarled a curse.

"Stand still and fight, you lily-fingered bum!"

He charged in, belting with both fists. This time Matty didn't give ground. He met Stone's rush in midring with a stiff left. They stood in the center of the ring and slugged. The crowd was suddenly on its feet, a roar of wild approving shouts filled the little club. This was what they laid their dough on the line to see. This new guy was all right!

Matty Rourke was in the midst of a storm of leather yet inside him something sang fiercely. He liked this, it was in his blood. He handed back just a litttle more leather than Stone dished out. It was Rocky Stone who broke from that maelstrom of battering fists.

Stone snorted blood from his nose, swiped a glove across his mouth and bulled in again. Matty dropped back a step, jerked his jaw away from a vicious left hook. It looked like the blow landed squarely, but he rolled with it, took away most of the force. Rocky Stone thought he had him. He rocked back on his heels and cocked a right that was broadcast like it was put on the air by Clem McCarthy.

Matty Rourke didn't miss the opening.

He flashed in, fast as a lightweight. His own right was a blur of motion. Rocky Stone lifted to his toes. His head hammered back and his mouth snapped open and his rubber mouthpiece slathered from suddenly lax jaws. He swayed there in the center of the ring for a space, then he pitched forward and hit the canvas on his knees and forehead.

The referee took one look at Stone's quivering hulk and motioned to his corner to come and get him. He came across to Matty, lifted his right arm high, and Spike Babb was abruptly in the ring. The crowd was going crazy. Spike hugged Matty, yelled ecstatically above the crowd roar.

"A minute and twelve seconds, lad! Big Mat never done better. By Judas, you showed the dirty double-crossers! By Judas!"

Matty Rourke said grimly, "I'm glad they pulled it. Now we know I'm ready without a string of fights. Get me Battler Alders, Spike!"

CHAPTER IV

SPIKE BABB had a hard time holding Matty down after the Rocky Stone fight. The papers were no help to Spike and the promoters made it worse. Fans wanted to see more of the man who had kayoed Rocky Stone in shorter order than any of the contenders, but they wouldn't lay their dough on the barrelhead to see him go against third or fourth class palookas.

The promoters tried to sell Spider Johnson for Matty's next fight. Matty was all for it.

"Johnson stayed with Battler Alders fifteen rounds," Matty argued. "Benson will have to sign me against Alders after I take Johnson."

"*If* you take Johnson, lad."

"I took Rocky Stone, didn't I? In less than either Johnson or Alders needed."

Spike Babb looked at the big fellow narrowly.

"By Judas, lad, you ain't as cocky as that sounds, I hope."

Matty flushed, ran his fingers through his crisp brown hair.

"I'm not cocky, Spike. It's just that—that—"

"Sure, lad, I know," the little man cut in. "You want Alders and I ain't blamin' you. Only you made me your trainer and manager and I say not yet. You chilled Rocky Stone and, by Judas, I'd go along with you that you could do it again. Still and all, the fight didn't last long enough to prove much. Spider Johnson is as clever a ring workman as there is in the heavies. You'll meet him, yes, and after Johnson you'll get Alders. But not till you got some fights under your skin."

Matty was forced to listen. Cagy Spike Babb laid it flat out to the promoters, insisted on a choice of seven or eight men he named.

"By Judas, I ain't throwin' the lad to the wolves for no lousy few quick dollars," he said. "The fans wanta see him, all right—on my terms. No dice on shooting Matty Rourke against a top flight battler until he's ready."

Finally they saw Spike meant it. Two weeks later Matty went on in the same club. He won in the fifth, knocked out his man with a terrific right to the heart.

Matty learned a lot in those five rounds. He was content to listen to Spike. Spike Babb kept him going at a steady pace. A fight every two weeks and constant training to smooth out rough spots that showed up. Matty improved fast. Tim McCarty kept the drums beating with the newspaper boys.

Matty Rourke won ten straight fights. He was in the semi-final spots on the cards now, and he had developed a following. He fought a questionable draw in his twelfth fight, had his man out cold on the floor when the gong sounded for the end of the fight, then came back two weeks later and iced the same battler in the second canto.

Newspaper clamor set up anew for Matty to be matched with Spider Johnson, the winner to go against Battler Alders.

"Well, looks like the doc's earned top billing," Tim McCarty said. "I got it from a pal on one of the big downtown

sheets that Henly will be around with a proposition for a Spider Johnson go."

Spike Babb frowned worriedly.

"It's too fast, Tim. The lad is good, but he's only been fightin' six months. I don't like it."

Promoter Henly came around and he didn't beat around the bush.

"Your boy and Johnson will draw," he said. "I ain't interested in putting Rourke on with anybody else. I've got two spots lined up, take it or leave it. I'll put the Johnson-Rourke go on for the last indoor show, and I got Battler Alders signed to meet the winner in a ball park show in May.

"That's practically giving you a shot at a title. Benson's got it just about set for Alders to be declared kinda champ pro tem—while Sergeant Joe is in the Army—and Joe maybe never will return to the ring. Alders is going to meet somebody in this ball park show for the U. S. O. It's up to you."

Tim McCarty said, "Hell, Spike, the doc can take Johnson. Sign it."

Spike Babb signed, but he had plenty of misgivings. "The lad ain't ready for Spider Johnson," he grumbled.

Then Henly said a funny thing

"There's more dough for you with Rourke meeting the top men. You ain't got no worry."

He left. Tim McCarty and Babb looked puzzledly at each other.

"You know," the former newspaperman said thoughtfully, "that crack didn't sound right. I think I'll do some snooping. Sounds to me like Henly knows something we don't know!"

THE fight between Matty and Spider Johnson was something to watch—for six rounds. Spider Johnson was a tall slenderly built man with abnormally long arms He looked fragile, as though one good punch would break him in pieces. Matty quickly learned that it was no easy matter to land even one solid smack.

The Spider kept a long rapier left stuck in Matty's face from the bell. Matty couldn't get set, and when he tried to slip inside Johnson's guard, the lanky fighter expertly tied him up. It was Spider Johnson's round by a mile.

The second stanza was a carbon copy of the first round. And the third. Matty kept trying, and his face was red where the long jabs kept flicking him. His breath rasped in his throat as Spike Babb worked over him between the third and fourth.

"He's tough, lad, but he ain't perfect. Keep after him and wait for an opening. They all slip once in a while."

"I'll get him," Matty panted.

He began to wonder as the rounds rolled around. He couldn't get near enough for a solid rap. The fifth was almost over when he finally tagged the Spider the first solid smack, a right over the heart. Spider Johnson fought back furiously, not with jabs. A looping right connected high on Matty's cheek, but there was sufficient authority in the wallop to stagger him.

Surprisingly, it was Spider Johnson who rushed into a clinch. Matty didn't get it, the Spider logically should have followed his advantage. In the clinch Spider muttered, "Sorry, Rourke, I forgot."

Matty puzzled over the remark, finally put it down to strategy on Johnson's part, an attempt to befuddle him. Matty said nothing to Spike.

The sixth round came and the fans were yelling for blood. Matty rushed from his corner, intent on getting Spider before those long arms could hold him off. Matty's left crashed through Spider's guard, slammed his head back. Matty cocked the murderous right, but Spider was on his bicycle, back-pedaling furiously.

Suddenly he stopped, pivoted and the old one-two rattled off Matty. They stood there for seconds and traded punches, neither man giving. The crowd roared wildly to their feet, yelled for a knockout.

Smash! Whoomp! Thud!

The bruising sound of sodden gloves crunching flesh and bone filled Matty's ears. This spidery fellow had surprising body to his punches. Just before the bell, Matty saw an opening and threw his

right. Fast as he was, the lane closed a bit faster..

Spider Johnson took the force of that lethal right on the shoulder he chunked his jaw behind, but Matty's Sunday punch caught a piece of his jaw, staggered the Spider. The whites of his eyes rolled and he fell into a clinch.

The bell clanged before the ref could pry them apart.

"You had him for a second, lad," Spike said. "He felt that. Get him this round."

Matty nodded. Confidence flowed through him. The fanciest of them slowed to a walk when you tabbed them with the old sockeroo.

He went out for the seventh and crowded the Spider. He sunk a hard right hook in the Spider's guts and crossed with a sharp left to the head. The glove thudded home to the jaw, Spider Johnson dove to the canvas, rolled over, seemed to struggle to get up, and flopped back to the rosin as the fans rattled the rafters.

BUT Matty Rourke was puzzled. In the dressing room as Spike cut off his gloves, Matty frowned.

"That Spider certainly folded in a hurry," he said. "I didn't tag him as hard with that left as I did with the right in the sixth. He must have a bad spot on that one side."

Spike's eyes were cloudy. He looked at Tim McCarty. Tim said, "Yeah, doc, a glass jaw, I guess." He kept looking at Spike.

The door opened and Henly, the promoter of the fight, came in. He was followed by a tall stern-visaged man with the straight stiff bearing of a military man. Henly said without preamble:

"Babb, I won't be able to pay off on your end of the purse. Colonel Eisen has ordered me to withhold it pending investigation."

"What investigation? What are you talking about?"

The tall military-appearing man answered Spike Babb.

"As chairman of the Commission," Colonel Eisen said, "I must inform you that we are not satisfied with tonight's fight. Whispered rumors came to us several days ago that something not according to Hoyle was being concocted. We get such rumors before every big fight and naturally we do not attach too much significance to them. But we never ignore them.

"Tonight's fight, gentlemen, looks queer. I think we all agree—and a canvass of experts at the ringside brings the same composite opinion—that Spider Johnson weathered harder blows than the one that knocked him out."

Spike Babb eyed the Commission official.

"The knockout punch ain't always the hardest sock, Colonel," he said. "Men have been worn down before now until they practically fell over."

"Not after they had led the whole fight; not by such light punishment as Johnson took!"

Tim McCarty was watching Henly. The former newspaperman drawled softly, "So you knew something shady was being pulled. Is this something else Benson engineered?"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" The promoter was indignant. He blustered, "Be careful of your tongue, McCarty. There is such a thing as slander!"

"And there's such a thing as slimy lizards that let themselves be used by skunks in high places," Tim McCarty said. He faced Colonel Eisen. "Just what is the specific charge?"

Colonel Eisen hesitated, finally said, "We make no charge as yet. In the light of what happened, however, we intend to make thorough investigation. If there is any slight proof that Spider Johnson deliberately threw this fight to Rourke—well, the Commission will take drastic action."

"If Johnson went into the tank, nobody connected with Matty Rourke knew about it," Tim McCarty said. "We welcome an investigation."

Matty Rourke said grimly, "I believe this is further effort on the part of B. J. Benson to ruin me. I should welcome a complete airing of this business as well as other peculiar occurrences to me."

Tim McCarty faced Henly, said, "Tell that dirty so-and-so who makes you jump through a hoop that we're ready for him. Things are going to bust wide open around here!"

CHAPTER V

IT WAS an oddly assorted gathering in the spacious office of Colonel Eisen. Besides Matty, Spike and Tim, there were Battler Alders, Henly and a hulking beetle-browed oldish man, Squidge Pavelec. He was manager of Spider Johnson. Oddly enough, Spider Johnson was not there. The last to enter the office were B. J. Benson and a tall scholarly appearing man who wore pince-nez glasses. He looked questioningly at the stiff gentleman behind the desk.

"Colonel Eisen?" he queried. "I received your wire and I am here. However, I am constrained to wonder why I should be summarily summoned to—"

"Ah, yes," the Colonel said smoothly, "you are Dr. Rice, I assume. I believe you will learn why I invited you, doctor, as things progress. Have a chair and—"

"For my part, Eisen, I should like more explanation than that." It was the heavy voice of B. J. Benson that cut in. His eyes darted around the group and there was something apprehensive in their depths. The well-manicured fingers of a plump hand nervously fondled a watch chain stretched across a noticeable paunch.

"I suppose you asked Dr. Rice and me in reference to Rourke, although why all these others are here is beyond me. I am a busy man; I can only give you a few moments."

"A few moments should suffice." Colonel Eisen's tone was flat and there was distaste in the steady look he gave Benson. Eisen turned to Tim McCarty.

"It's your party," the colonel said.

Tim arose and started speaking in a slow drawl. He reviewed briefly the Matty Rourke-Spider Johnson fight, kept his gaze on Henly.

"I was a sports writer for years," Tim said. "And the boys who write sports get around. I smelled something fishy after a remark Henly made and I enlisted the aid of pals still in the newspaper game. I learned that Spider Johnson does have a glass jaw, oddly on the right side only. Johnson did not go into the tank. He was under the impression Matty Rourke was doing a dive for *him*. He'd been instructed to carry Matty for ten rounds.

"Henly knew the setup, knew that in all probability Matty would knock Johnson out in less than ten rounds. He knew that it was planned to circulate the story that Johnson took a dive in order to harm Matty Rourke."

"That's a lie!" Promoter Henly jumped to his feet. "Why should I—"

"Because Benson ordered it," Tim said harshly. He suddenly turned on Squidge Pavelec. "You know the setup, Pavelec. Benson ordered it, didn't he?"

Squidge Pavelec looked quickly at Benson. The paunch-bellied big-shot had a queer frightened look in his eyes. He said quickly:

"Of course it's not true! McCarty is a sorehead, trying to besmirch me because he's got a crazy idea that he lost his job through me. I refuse to stay and listen to such drivel!"

"Sit down!" Colonel Eisen's voice carried the ring of drill-ground authority. "You'll stay and you'll listen! Go on, McCarty."

Tim went on. He went back to Big Mat Rourke, told everything. He told how he'd been assigned to go with Battler Alders that day in Ruxford. He told how Alders had deliberately picked a fight and then lied about Matty.

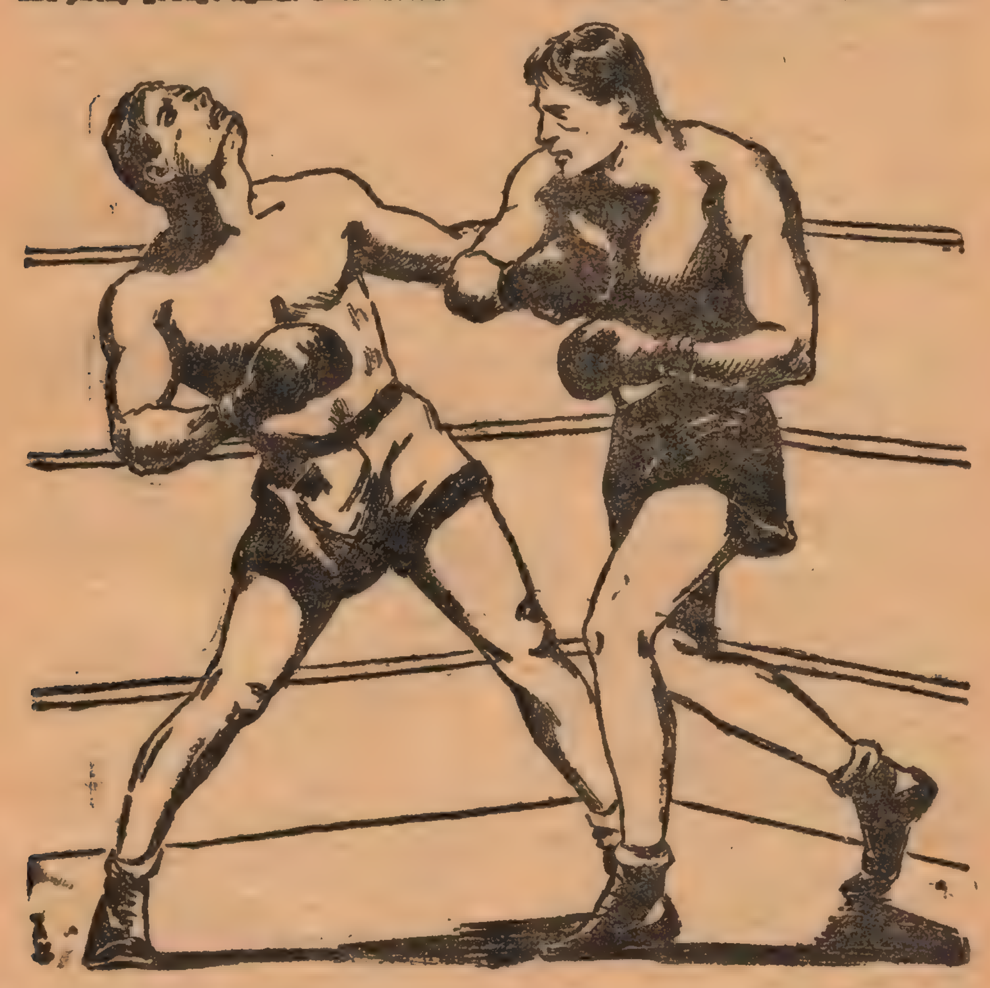
"So you're the Nazi louse that hit me when I wasn't lookin'!" Battler Alders jumped up, leaped across the room. Matty Rourke was out of his chair.

"I beat your ears off once," Alders snarled. "I can't wait for a chance to do it again!"

"There never will be a more propitious moment," Matty said quietly. "You knew all along who I am and you know that you are a liar of the first water!"

An electric silence gripped the room. It was broken by Colonel Eisen. He came from around the desk and a gleam was in the boxing commissioner's eyes.

"When I was active in the Army," he said, "we had a way of settling differences, man to man and not with talk. Perhaps boxing needs some of that sort of thing instead of bickering over purses and phony grudge fights. There seems to be ample space and I offer my services as referee. Nothing is holding you back, gentlemen!"



Matty Rourke threw a quick look at the commissioner. An eager light leaped into Matty's brown eyes. He shucked off his coat and shirt. Battler Alders hesitated, then, with a snarl, he ripped off his coat and shirt.

"Migawd, stop 'em, Eisen!" Henly's wail was filled with anguish.

Colonel Eisen said, "There will be no rounds, gentlemen. When a man is knocked down the other man must stand back until he regains his feet. Either one of you can terminate the fight at any time by not getting up or simply quitting. I will tolerate no foul punches."

"A hundred grand they'd draw!" groaned Henly. "And they do it for free! Stop 'em, somebody!"

"Everybody crowd in at the ends of the desk." Colonel Eisen surveyed the space left in the big office. It was almost as much as the area of a regular ring. "Are you ready, gentlemen?"

Spike Babb crowded close to Matty, laid a hand on the big man's arm.

"It's the screwiest setup I ever saw for a fight, lad," Spike said. "I gotta hunch this is some of Tim's doing. You've worked hard for a shot at Alders, take

'im, lad! Take 'im for Big Mat Rourke!"

Matty nodded shortly. Colonel Eisen said, "Fire at will, gentlemen!"

IT FELT strange going out there with no bell, no crowd, no blazing lights overhead. This was elemental, real. A hardness came into Matty Rourke. The main thing was that he had Alders before him.

Battler Alders was no meatball. He'd fought a hundred ring battles and he knew the tricks of his trade. He met Matty in the center, feinted his left and whistled a right. The bare fist cracked against Matty's cheek. Matty ripped his own left. It smacked flesh below the Battler's ear. Matty bludgeoned a short right and it connected solidly. Alders danced sidewise. Matty followed, pounded home short power-laden wallops.

He took the play completely from Alders and it looked as if the fight wouldn't last long. Then suddenly Battler Alders launched a vicious counterattack. A looping right streaked from nowhere, caught Matty on the side of the neck. A hard left hook snaked through his guard and Matty's head hammered back.

"Box' im, lad, box 'im! Take it easy!"

Matty tried to follow Spike's shouted advice, but Alders followed his advantage, crowded him. Alders was really throwing punches, his bare knuckles cracked and rattled blows on Matty's face and head. Blood dripped and ran down Matty's cheek from a gash below his eye. And suddenly a powerhouse right exploded against his jaw. Matty Rourke crashed to the floor.

Where was it he'd been in that thick fog before? Somebody should do something about this, a man just couldn't stand in the bottomless stuff. A great black-haired figure loomed through the cloud and then was suddenly a little man with a crooked nose, yelling in a voice that was a thousand miles away:

"Get up, lad, get up! By Judas, you gotta get up! Think of Big Mat!"

Suddenly Matty's senses cleared and he knew that Battler Alders had floored him. He pushed himself erect. Battler Alders leaped in confidently to polish off his man. He was too confident.

Matty slipped inside the curving left Alders threw and his right shot upward. That uppercut had behind it all the bitterness Matty felt from the treatment he and Big Mat Rourke had received. It exploded against Alders' chin like a howitzer shell. There was no mouthpiece to absorb any of the jar and Matty felt the shock of Alders' teeth jamming together through his arm. A dazed glassiness filmed Alders' eyes.

Afterwards Tim McCarty and Spike Babb argued as to how many times Matty hit Alders before he toppled. Tim maintained he counted seven and thought he'd missed one. Spike said six. The trip-hammer bludgeons that were Matty's fists pistoned so fast it was impossible to count the blows accurately.

Battler Alders' face was splattered ground meat, but it was doubtful if he felt any of the blows after that explosive uppercut. When he toppled to the floor, anyone could see he would be out for some time.

Tim McCarty suddenly reached out a hand and jerked Squidge Pavelec forward.

"Here's another louse to work on, doc," Tim said. "This is the dirty lug that kept his mouth shut and let Mat Rourke go to prison!"

"Youse is crazy! I don't know—"

"You're the one, Pavelec. Nobody could ever understand why Benson kept you hanging around, why he bought the contract of Spider Johnson and gave it to you. He *had* to, Pavelec! You've got something on Benson. That something is the knowledge you've got that Killer Birk did not die as a result of Mat Rourke hitting him!"

"No! I tell you, youse is nuts!"

"You'd better talk, Pavelec—or do you want to face a charge of murdering Killer Birk? Murder is never outlawed, Pavelec!"

Squidge Pavelec threw a glance at B. J. Benson. Benson's face was putty gray.

"A tissue of lies!" Benson screamed. "You fool, don't talk! McCarty can't—"

"Take him, doc," Tim cut in. He spun Squidge Pacevec toward Matty. "Beat the truth outa him!"

Pavelec cringed from Matty abruptly broke.

"I'll talk, I'll talk!" he cried. "Don't let 'im hit me. I'm an old man!"

COLONEL EISEN folded the typewritten paper that was a full confession from Squidge Pavelec and B. J. Benson. Benson, Pavelec, Henly and Battler Alders were gone. Colonel Eisen looked at Matty Rourke.

"Son," the Colonel said, "you and Tim did boxing a great service. The Commission has not been unaware of the vicious cancerous growth on the game, but until you men broke the thing, we could never pin it down. When McCarty told me this remarkable story, backed it up with the pictures he took at Ruxford and other proof, I knew we had a chance of smashing the Benson ring.

"The proof McCarty got that Killer Birk really cracked his skull when he fell in a drunken argument with Squidge Pavelec, after he left the alley behind Big Mat's restaurant, wouldn't have held in court. But Tim and I figured we could stage it so Pavelec would spill his guts.

"It was a cinch Benson couldn't hold out once we got Pavelec to talk. Benson must have lived in Hell, knowing that he'd allowed his innocent partner to go to prison, die there, because of his greed. It probably is a relief, really, for him to confess."

Spike Babb said, "One thing, Colonel, that fight. Was that part of the stagin'?"

Eisen smiled. "In a way," he admitted. "And maybe just a little melodrama on my part. I've always been curious to see how a pair of modern ringmen would react if they had to battle like the old-time bare-fisters. You see, this thing can't be given publicity. It would do boxing irreparable harm. But at the same time, Benson nor Pavelec nor Henly nor Alders can ever again have anything to do with the fight game.

"Tim convinced me that Matty Rourke could—ah—'beat the tar outa that ham-and-egger' was the phrase Tim used, so we planned to inveigle Alders into a position where he had to fight. Matty couldn't be deprived of his opportunity for revenge and we're going to need someone to put in the spot Benson had arranged for Alders."

Colonel Eisen turned to Matty then.

"You're top-ranking man, son. You'll meet whoever Babb picks in the U. S. O. show in May."

Matty Rourke grinned, suddenly ran his hand through his crinkly brown hair.

"That is mighty fine, sir. But I'm afraid you will have to ask permission of my future boss."

The tall scholarly gentleman at the other end of the desk had said no word since he came into the office. But now the face of Dr. Rice, President of Ruxford College, lit up. He looked at Matty.

"Ah, I see you anticipate what I am about to say, Dr. Bri—that is, Dr. Rourke," Rice said. "Of course, Ruxford is anxious to rectify the wrong we did you. We shall be proud to have you on our staff."

Mathew Rourke, Jr., Ph.D., said quietly:

"Thank you, sir. I may recall your promise to you some day. However, that isn't what I have in mind. You see, gentlemen, I am enlisted in the United States Marine Reserve. I was deferred in order to take a teaching position, but when circumstances changed, I vowed that I would wait only until I had squared matters with Alders and Benson before I asked for active duty. I shall report tomorrow."

Colonel Eisen rose, saluted smartly, stuck out his hand.

"That's the stuff, son," he said. "Punch hell out of them! Punch them the way you punched Benson out of business. You'll all be back sooner."



The Crowd Roars

By Edwin Laird

In a pinch the best coaching an athlete can get doesn't come from his manager—it comes from you fans yourselves.



LEW PEREZ faced Jimmy Cartelli at the Broadway Arena. Both boys could sock, and at one hundred-fifty pounds apiece they had weight enough behind their punches to do damage.

Lew went into a slugger's pose, his left hand held low for a hook to the midsection, his right cocked chin high for a cross to the jaw. When a man stands that way, it means he intends to take three to give one and everybody from Cartelli to the farthest bleacher fan knew it. Leach Cross fought that way and a great many other famous sluggers.

Cartelli did the expected thing. He stabbed Lew with a left over that high cocked right, dropped both elbows across his midsection to block either a left hook or a right hook to the heart, swayed to his right to take the steam from any right cross to his jaw, uppercut with both hands, and went into a clinch.

Lew swung his left futilely into those clamped elbows, tried a right cross which wasted its force on the air where Cortelli's head had been, and found himself being cut up by murderous uppercuts during the in-fighting.

Then came the voice of a leather-lunged Brooklyn fan, "Punch foist, Lew," he yelled. "Don't wait fer him to lead. Punch foist."

Now if the fight had been in Madison Square Garden, Lew never would have heard. For there the first fifty rows of seats are occupied by Broadway boys who had their hearts burned out with the excitement of the Big Stem years ago. They never would think of yelling at a fighter. The real fans are yards and yards away from the ring and their voices do not get through the tobacco smoke; the boys fight as if in a glass case.

But this was the Broadway Arena, a place where your red hot fan can rest his nose on the edge of the ring canvas if he gets too tired to hold up his head and where the boys fight practically in the laps of the customers.

Lew heard that fan. He heard the chorus who seconded the motion. And he began to "swing foist."

Cartelli came in for another left jab. But the instant he was within range, Lew let go with a terrific left hook for the jaw. It missed, but Lew was following up with a right cross for the same spot. If it had landed an inch lower the fight would have ended right there. As it was, a cool and confident Cartelli who thought he was up against a punching bag, suddenly changed into a careful and crafty boy who knew that only his best would avoid a knockout.

In the second round, Lew started letting punches go to the back of the neck when Cartelli ducked. Again the fans took up their voice.

"Cut dat out," they yelled.

The punches were perfectly legal. But the fans did not like them for such tactics leave a fighter helpless to defend himself against the uppercuts and piston punches in the in-fighting. And the fans

never like any punch which lands on the back anyway.

Lew switched his tactics and pushed Cartelli away in the clinches, trying to put him on the spot for a knockout. And in this the fans encouraged him.

It was Lew who went on to win. He did not land the knockout, for he did not have experience enough to know how to plan it against a ringwise orthodox type of boxer.

But if Lew keeps on listening to the fans, he will punch his way right into their hearts and he will learn enough ring craft to make the big time. For the customers are tired of watching one standard type fighter after another. Men who follow the safe and sane rules and look as much alike as if they had come off a factory production line, and who do exactly the same things to each other in exactly the same way night after night. Lew can go on to be a never-forgotten man like Jack Dillon, Harry Greb and Jack Dempsey, to mention a few. . . .

IN BASKETBALL the fans help the players a lot, too. When Aberdeen Proving Grounds faced Fort Dix in the Garden, it was clear to every fan in the place that Aberdeen was losing because the men took one step too many before letting go of the apple.

Soon the rafters rang with the cry, "Shoot!" Every time that last available second arrived, the shout roared out from three thousand throats. And although it did not turn Aberdeen into a world-beating aggregation, the combined pressure of all those voices did cure that fault for that one night and make things much tougher for Fort Dix.

Aberdeen may not have learned any lasting lesson. It is so easy to pose before shooting, to get into that set position from which the chances of sinking the pill are so great. But the opportunity for an opponent to prevent the basket is also as great. A team which once forms this habit seldom breaks it; the first game against a soft opponent will completely overcome any cure which experience against a hard opponent may have applied. But almost any team can add ten points per game to its average score by listening to the fans.

In basketball the referee is helped a lot by a certain type of spectator. This bimbo seems to go to the game for no other purpose than to call fouls from the grandstand.

"Look at dat walkin'!" he will yell. "Pickin' off! Pickin' off!" he screams.

Basketball has so many rules that if the referee enforced all of them to the letter a high school team with a good foul shooter would be able to beat Long Island University. The ref. has to close his eyes to a lot that he sees and try to be fair to both sides. And the fan with his yelling either warns the player so he stops the fouling or makes the fouls so apparent that nobody can kick when the official begins to whistle that player down.

There has to be an exception to this help by the fans and hockey is the sport in which to find it.

Hockey is one game in which the action is so fast that before the fan can get out his yell the play has gone down to the other end of the rink and has come back.

The fans yell of course. But no two agree upon what to yell. They cannot hold their voices, but their rooting becomes a single high pitched scream which starts with every face-off, explodes with every body check, and sounds like a pack of hounds at the kill when the puck goes into the netting.

In baseball the voice of the fan is the score keeper of the factors which never get into the official records.

Is a pitcher tiring? The fans know it long before any manager. Is a player taking too long a lead from first base? The roar of the crowd tells the pitcher that if he makes a real hard try on his cutoff throw, he may get him, and the ball comes over there like a cannon shot. Is an outfielder laying in the wrong spot? The denizens of the bleachers soon will put him right.

Old John McGraw used to tell his fellow managers, "Always listen when the crowd tells you that a player is slipping, for they will see it long before you do."

Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig both hit their hardest when the fans yelled the

loudest for these wise old baseball heads knew that the fans could tell when a pitcher was slowing down and the batter had the edge, much better than any man on the bench could.

WILY old Bill Tilden has long been accused of being a grandstand player in tennis. And so he is until he gets the grandstand yelling at his shots. Then if he has not made you too excited to observe, you will see Bill steady down and start playing his unspectacular but sure-kill backhand shots.

He knows then that the bleachers will tell him when his opponent is hot and he himself has lost the pace and started to cool off. The fans, and especially the ones who hope with all their hearts to see him lose, have won many a game for Big Bill just by coaching him.

The boy who lays down his good money in exchange for a pasteboard entitling him to sit on a hard wooden seat and yell at the fighters, often is the one who really wins the fight. The athlete who listens to the voice of the spectators —old Jim Corbett used to call it "The Roar of the Crowd" really is hearing the wisest coach that sports ever have known.

So yell, you fanatics! Let your raucous voices come bellowing out strong and raspy!

Never fear that your wisecracks are heard only by the spectators in front whose ears start flapping from the concussion.

You are taking a real part in the sport. You are teaching youngsters, warning faulty teams, helping officials, and winning the games of wise old-timers for them.

You taught fighters like Jack Dempsey most of what they know. You caused Joe Louis to change his style in mid-fight and go on to win from Carnera and Schmeling. If Allie Stoltz would learn how to listen to you he might be a champion.

I have seen such a wise old outfielder as Dixie Walker change from a slow lope to a swift sprint at your howls on one of the rare occasions when he was wrong about the speed of a flyball. You yelled the Brooklyn Dodgers into pennants and you screamed the Cardinals into their victory over the Yankees in 1942.

Your shouts, coming at unexpected moments, have upset the dope and turned many an underdog into a winner. In that famous fourteen count ring in Chicago, Gene Tunney ducked at your yell when he could not see a punch that Jack Dempsey had lifted from the floor and Gene went on to win. You did not intend Gene to win, you were yelling to help Jack, but never mind. Just scream your heads off. Sports, all sorts of sports, will be as good as your rooting and shouting can make them.

Homestretch Headache

By David X. Manners



Though Jackie Reed could conscientiously ride a gee-gee with the best of them, this time he galloped to the barrier with a crime cloud over his head.

JACKIE REED felt chilled and uneasy as he walked down the path from the jockey house. His flaming silks and riding pants were weirdly unfamiliar to him. His cap felt strange on his head. When he got to the paddock where the nags were pacing the walking ring, waiting for the fifth-race bugle, he was so scared it took him half a minute to pick out Bad Boy, his own mount.

"I know you ain't raced in eight months," said skinny little Hollister to Jackie, "but you got nothin' to worry about." Hollister and a shiny, black Carolina stableswipe were handling Bad Boy in the ring. "You feel all right, Jackie?"

"Yeah, I feel fine," Jackie said, and felt his heart hammering hollowly in his chest. He looked about for his boss, Tip Murray, owner of the Boy, hoping that Tip's presence might steady him.

"Tip's down at his broadcast," the

runty Hollister said, as if understanding Jackie's look. "But he'll be here by post time. Depend on that." Hollister grinned warmly, reassuringly to Jackie, patted his silk-clad back.

Jackie tried to return a smile, but the tight ache in his throat spoiled it. He owed so much to little Hollister—almost as much as he owed Tip. From the time he was thirteen, Jackie had been around Hollie as an apprentice. For seven years they had booted mounts for the same stables. When Jackie had been grounded for eight months on charges of riding a ringer, Hollie had stuck by him. He and Tip were the only ones who had.

It was a nasty business to be caught racing a horse under another horse's name. And Tip was a top name in movies and radio. Yet at the risk of what it might do to his box office, it was Tip who'd finally cleared Jackie's name with the track stewards. For Jackie had been innocently involved.

Jackie looked at Hollie's friendly little prune-face, his dried-pear ears, and he remembered how only yesterday Hollie had spoken to Tip about a job for him. Waiting for Hollie, just outside of Bad Boy's stable, Jackie heard every word.

"Now listen, Hollie, how can I have him ride for me?" Tip argued in his husky, resonant voice so familiar to radio and movie fans. "Jackie may be a swell boy, but they'll talk if I race him. And what actor can stand unfavorable publicity?"

"But smart riders are scarce," Hollie pleaded. "An' if you don't use him, who can you get? I'm through as a rider, Mr. Murray. Jackie's smart and clean. And I'm telling you he'd make a swell race on Bad Boy."

"I know. I know. Yes, he's got a clean slate now. He was an innocent party in the thing, and I'd like to use him, but—"

Jackie turned away from the stable, his teeth tight, his eyes stinging. He'd always admired Tip Murray, had wanted to ride for him more than for any owner he knew. Still he couldn't blame him now for looking out for himself.

Then Jackie heard Hollie call, come running up behind him. "It's all set," Hollie said. "Tip says it's okay. He's tickled to death to have you race for him. He wants you up on Bad Boy in the fifth tomorrow."

TIP was not tickled to death, but it was like Hollie, Jackie thought, to make him think Tip was. Then Jackie said incredulously, "Did you say he wants me on Bad Boy?" Why, the great bay was the Argentine wonder horse!

Hollie laughed, laughed as if the way Jackie put his question was very funny. Jackie didn't quite get it.

The first bugle sounded now in the under-the-stands paddock, and the paddock judge called, "Get your riders up!"

Jackie saw Tip then. Tip rushed up, his blue eyes alight with excitement. "How's it cookin'?" Tip's hand was on Jackie's leg as Jackie sat in the saddle. "How's everything, boys?"

Tip ran a soothing hand along Bad Boy's neck, and Jackie noticed the hand was trembling. Tip's hair was thinning and he was getting a little ample around the waist. Tip was slipping in both movies and radio. But he'd paid a hundred thousand dollars for the big, red Argentine wonder horse he called Bad Boy. Beautiful horseflesh, a driving finish—nothing was more important to Tip than that.

Jackie spoke past the tightness in his throat. "I'll ride you a race, Mr. Murray!" he promised.

Tip's smile was slow, friendly. "I'm sure you will," he said.

Bad Boy danced nervously, eagerly, under Jackie's legs. Jackie knew, from the records, the big red's sensational victories at six furlongs as a two-year-old.

The loudspeaker came on. The horses finished their brush around the turn, paraded to the post. Bad Boy was prancing, tense, electric. Jackie kept a close rein.

The horses reached the starting gate. The loudspeaker announced the jockeying of the entries into the little Puett stalls. Then—

There they go-o-o!

Bad Boy erupted like a thunderbolt, heading off the pack of eight horses in the dash for the rail. The track was fast. *This is a horse,* Jackie thought. *A hun-*

dred thousand dollars' worth! The kind of horse you'd expect a fellow like Tip Murray to own.

Bad Boy took the bit in his teeth. Jackie's arms went worriedly tight to hold the big red horse in. Bad Boy was a fast starter. Rate him, that's what he had to do. Rate him—or the big fellow would kill off all his speed within four furlongs! Remiss and El Cato moved ahead as Jackie checked the red long enough for the racers on the outside to swing to the tail. Holler Guy came alongside.

It would take an excruciating 1:49 to win the mile and a sixteenth today!

Passing the stand, the big red stayed with the pack. El Cato was out front and Sparrow Maid was closing. Flying dirt slapped into Jackie's face. The breath pounded from him. Up there in the stands, he knew, Tip was watching him, shouting, gesturing with clenched fists, wondering if his new rider was going to make good.

El Cato was still out front. Jackie spoke to the Bad Boy. His response came like a giant dynamo of power. Bad Boy was a champion and knew he was a champion. His heart might be going out of him, his wind might be a painful rasping ache, but he'd never show it.

In the backstretch, Jackie let the big red out. The dizzy pace knocked the blood from Jackie's brain. The half mile post was a fog in his vision. But he thought, *I'll take him through for Tip. I'll make good. I'll make up to Tip for sticking by me.*

Jackie drove to overtake Sparrow Maid. El Cato pocketed Bad Boy, and Jackie moved to squeeze through on the inside. Hooves were a maelstrom of thunder all about Jackie. He thought he would never get through—but then he was through!

Bad Boy ran like a robot. The strapping red was showing that Tip's scraping a hundred grand for him was worth it. He was showing he was a crazy, running fool who never heard of tortured nerves or throbbing, racking muscles. He was one length, two lengths, three lengths out front!

HE POINTED for the last turn. Jackie's tired knees and calves gripped numbly at the big red's withers. He heard the aching rattle of Bad Boy's breath, and then he heard hoofbeats behind him!.

Jackie glimpsed the outthrust head of El Cato. He saw fluttering silks and he knew Sparrow Maid was moving to the outside for room. They were coming like windswept shadows. They turned for home, came down for the finish line, their jockeys whipping and pumping. Other horses moved up on Bad Boy then. In wild tumult, a half dozen horses levelled for the finish.

Jackie felt Bad Boy quiver under his legs. The Boy's red head twisted at an angle and his eyes were crazy. Froth was at his mouth.

Jackie clutched for his whip in sudden, desperate panic. He felt Bad Boy's last tremendous surge. He'd win. He had to win. But El Cato and Sparrow Maid forged toward the wire. Remiss drove alongside.

Then they were over the line, and the tumult of the crowd pierced the bitter tumult in Jackie's brain. The loudspeaker yawped, "The winner: El Cato. El Cato by a length. Sparrow Maid by a nose. And Remiss—" He'd lost! Tip gave him a chance, gave him his best horse to ride—and he'd lost!

Jackie saw Tip come down out of his box. His face was a pale yellow and his thin hair was disheveled. He took the blanket the stableswipe held ready for Bad Boy.

Jackie dismounted. "I'm sorry—Mr. Murray," he choked.

Tip Murray's thin-haired head was down. He said nothing.

Jackie dragged back to the jockey house. Hollis found him there later, packing his riding clothes into a bag.

"Hey, watcha doin'?" the little ex-jockey asked.

"I'm cleaning out my locker," Jackie said. "I'm through. Mr. Murray doesn't have to tell me."

Hollis gave him a slow look. "Because you brought Bad Boy home fifth?" He brought up a laugh. "Don't be a drip.

Why, that's the best race that Argentine tango dancer run in a dog's age. His feet are too big. They clop together when he runs"

Jackie gasped. He stared at Hollie.

"Sure, he did all right as a two-year-old—that's how Tip got suckered into buying him. Tip's got a heart instead of a brain. Like today. He played five grand on the beak for the clown. It was the dough he was glum about—not your ride. Jackie. Tip's outside now. He wants to see you."

"You rode a nice race, Jackie," Tip Murray said, when Jackie met him outside, under the dappled shade of a sycamore. Tip's suit was rumpled. His face was tired. "I'd like you to try again. I've got a couple good horses."

"But what about Bad Boy?" Jackie said. "Aren't you racing Bad Boy?"

Tip gave him a look. He started to say something, then shrugged it off. "They don't pay off on how you feel about a horse!" he said finally.

Jackie learned some things about Tip in the next days. Tip had been so high in the show world, Jackie took it for granted that he always would be. His broadcasts had only a few more weeks to run before his contract terminated, and his last pictures had been flops. He was getting too pudgy for Hollywood. Too unromantic. But it still took the same amount of money to care for Tip's wife and three youngsters. And Tip had always been rather free with his dough. And Bad Boy, to top things, had clipped Tip for an additional hundred grand.

Jackie thought of that hundred grand —a hundred grand that Tip desperately needed—and went right to work on Bad Boy. Besides, he was in love with the big, red animal. For about three-quarters of the race, no horse alive could touch him, Jackie found out. Then, any ploughhorse could.

"You see what I mean?" Tip said, in the cold gray dawn of an early morning workout. "You see how appearances can throw your judgment off? He's high strung, like a good thoroughbred should be. But when it comes to racing—" Tip broke off; he didn't have to go on with what he was thinking.

But Jackie remembered the feel of the big red between his legs during that fifth race in the Occidental, His power. The fight in him, fight as big as his tremendous body.

JACKIE was conscious that the eyes of the other owners and stablehands were on him occasionally as he went about his work. He knew they were passing remarks behind his back. They were saying he was the rider who had been mixed up in a crooked deal, and that Tip Murray really must be slipping to employ him.

Still Jackie spent hours in the stable area. He watched the Boy eat and drink. He watched him dust-bathed after a blowout, watched him cooled, rubbed and groomed. Jackie bought up an old Toggenburg nanny goat for ten dollars and kept her in the stable with the Boy to quiet his nervousness.

The day came when Jackie knew the slurring cracks about him were getting through to Tip. It filled Jackie with a warm glow, seeing how Tip ignored them. Jackie's reaction was to drive himself the harder. He had to make good with the Boy. He had to show Tip his appreciation.

Then Jackie made a discovery. Tip was tired and irritable one day in a late afternoon visit to the stables. He said he'd bolted his lunch, dashing to a broadcast. He asked for a bicarbonate. Jackie could not help but see a parallel when he fed Bad Boy later. Bad Boy bolted his feed! He gulped it down in great swallows!

Jackie hand-fed him after that. He fed him little by little, so that he had to eat slowly. Almost immediately, a difference showed in his workouts. Bad Boy, he realized then, must have been suffering from chronic indigestion! Within a week, Jackie clocked the big red in a mile and an eighth at 1.50!

The Wildmere Memorial was just a week off. The Wildmere was the traditional race to nominate candidates for the fabulous Santa Rey handicap. Tip was making a joint entry for his stable. But he favored the nod to either Retake or Blue O' Night, his two other horses.

Jackie was glad Tip was at the rail the next morning to see him work the wild-eyed Bad Boy a mile in fast time.

Jackie left Bad Boy with Hollie and the stableswipe and, as soon as he dismounted, hurried eagerly over toward Tip.

"Well, Mr. Murray—you clocked that mile," Jackie bubbled. "Does the Boy look hot for the Wildmere?"

Jackie looked at Tip, but Tip's eyes didn't meet his. His head was tilted, cocked at an acute angle toward the grandstand wall beside him.

"You see who was working Tip Murray's horse?" a voice was saying beyond the grandstand's partition wall. "The old boy's washed up in pictures. Now he got this Jackie Reed kid riding for him. And you know who Reed is. I wonder if Murray figgers—"

Tip turned. Fists clenched, he started off for the door leading under the stand. The door was about a hundred yards down. Tip was standing there, his face flushed, breathing hard, when Jackie trailed uncertainly up. There were as least a dozen people under the stand. There was no way of knowing who had spoken.

Jackie felt sick. Tip saw his look.

Tip clapped him on the shoulder. "Never mind, Jackie. To hell with them!"

Jackie nodded, too stricken even to mumble appreciation, or protest Tip's sticking out his neck for him. Jackie even forgot to talk about the big red's going to the post in the Wildmere.

Bad Boy wasn't at his best the next day. Tip removed him from his stall at the track to private quarters on a ranch Tip had bought for the time when he'd have to face retirement. It would save Tip some expense, and there was a track handy nearby. The barns on the place were rickety, in bad repair, but they were full of hay and feed, and adequate. And Jackie and Hollie could live right there with Bad Boy and Retake and Blue O' Night.

Jackie lay despondently in his bunk the following night. A succession of events had brought him low. Tip had given him a chance to ride Bad Boy. He'd not brought home a winner. He'd tried to bring the big red Boy around to racing form. Today, in his workout, for all he knew, the Boy showed he was right back where he had started.

And worse than that, today the papers had all been full of a fight Tip had had with another actor in a studio lunchroom. The altercation was brief, but there were pictures. The thing bringing about the exchange of blows, putting Tip's mussed and weary face in all the papers from coast to coast, was a remark involving "Tip's employment of a jockey who was once barred from the tracks in a racing scandal."

Jackie got off his bunk. He dug into his valise, which he'd not yet unpacked. He found pencil and paper. He was glad little Hollie was out trying to find an electrician to fix a short-circuited line in one of the barns. Jackie wrote:

Dear Mr. Murray:

I am pulling out. You have been swell. But I think it's best for both of us. You've got enough on your hands without my troubles, too. Thanks a million—and best luck on the Boy.

JACKIE REED

Jackie put the note in an envelope, addressed it and placed it on the table in the bunkroom, where Hollie would find it. Hollie would get it to Tip.

Jackie trudged down the road, lugging his valise. He felt empty, drained of strength. He just missed a bus, and another would not be along for twenty minutes. He went into a bar near the bus stop to wait.

FIRE sirens screamed for nearly a half hour before they drilled into Jackie's consciousness. He didn't remember how many drinks he'd had. Then he heard someone say, "It was the damn cheap wiring, the electrician told me. Those old Murray barns are going down like hay. . . ."

Jackie sobered as if a growler of icewater was poured down his spine. He jumped at the man who had spoken.

"Sure," said the man. "Tip Murray's place—mile down the road."

Jackie groaned. Holy cow! The barns! The horses! Bad Boy!

Tip Murray was at the scene of the blaze. Hatless, pale, distraught, looking at the ruined wreckage of his hopes. Guttering firelight played in jumping colors on his pudgy, waxen face.

"You—" Tip rasped when he saw Jackie. Tears put hysteria in his voice. "Jackie, where've you been?" He clutched Jackie's shoulder.

Jackie's liquor-stupored tongue did not respond. "Mr. Murray, I—"

Tip's stricken face suddenly showed he was aware of Jackie's liquored breath. "Drunk! Why you—you ran out! When your job was here! That's why the place burned down. Drunk!"

Tip's fist cracked out. Jackie staggered back.

"Mr. Murray," Jackie began. "Let me explain. I—"

"You're going to explain?" Tip shouted in anguish. "This fire's put Hollie in the hospital. And where were you? For your part the horses could have burned." Tip advanced on Jackie, his fists clenched, held wide. "They warned me not to hire you. They said you were no good. Now I see why. Get out! Get off this place before I kill you!"

Jackie turned, stumbled away. Tip, he knew, never got his note. The note burned in the blaze.

Jackie stumbled on. He spent the night on a bench near the racetrack. The next morning, in a sleepy, bewildered daze, he read in the papers the details about the fire. Bad Boy and two other horses had been saved by Tip's trainer and former jockey, Hollie Hollister. The barns, totally destroyed, were not covered by insurance, nor was a great supply of hay and feed valued at several thousand dollars. The financial loss of the fire, coming on top of the $100,000 fizzle of Bad Boy, hit hard at the erstwhile top-ranking star.

Jackie was still near the track later in the day when he saw a horse transfer truck pull up. He saw Bad Boy unloaded. The later editions that day carried the story that Bad Boy was a definite entry for Saturday's $40,000 Wildmere Stakes.

Jackie shrugged. It was no longer his race. Bad Boy was no longer his horse. But he had felt the power of the big red under him. He had hand-fed him, seen his volatile spirit calmed a notch. He wondered who would ride him now, take him to the post for Tip. The Boy had horse tricks all his own, needed a jockey who understood him. A small owner like Tip Murray didn't have his pick of riders in a stake race.

Jackie counted his money. He got a room. He figured up his pennies. So much for the landlady. So much for beans. So much for a ticket to see Bad Boy in the Wildmere.

Then, on race-day morning, Jackie saw in the paper:

> Tip Murray, it is reported to this column, has scraped together every last cent he has in this or any other world for an all-out plunge on Bad Boy in the Wildmere today. Our best to the fading Tip, but we had hoped his common sense was better than his horse sense. To every knowing railbird, it looks like Tip, good old Tip, gets left at the post again.

Jackie went out to the track. He stopped, first, at Tip's house in town. He phone wires to the house. That would fit sneaked around the back and clipped the in with what he was to do later.

Jackie worked his way through the crowd and down to the jockey house. The second race was on. Boys were dressing. Jackie spotted the boy with the flame-colored Murray silks.

"You riding for Tip Murray?" he asked. The clean-washed boyish face nodded. "Well, Mr. Murray wants to see you right away. Come on."

Jackie took him out to the stable area, led him to an empty stall. He beckoned him inside, closed the door.

Ten minutes later, Hollie Hollister's eyes widened when he saw Jackie appear, dressed in Murray silks. Holly had bandages on his head and one arm. He was busy with gear near a stall that had Bad Boy's name on a broad-strip above its door.

Jackie said evenly, "I'm riding Bad Boy. Tip gave me the assignment."

HOLLIE stared at Jackie. His wrinkled little face hesitated, then brightened, as if the sun came out from behind a cloud. His quivering lips started to say something, but Jackie interrupted.

"You take the Boy to the saddling shed when it's time. I'll be there."

Jackie found a phone booth in the betting area under the stands. He dialed a number, which he had memorized earlier. Tip Murray would have to rush right over from his broadcast to make the fifth race. If anything delayed him, even momentarily, he would not make it.

"This is Mr. Murray's houseboy," Jackie said. His heart was hammering so loud he thought the switchboard operator at the broadcasting studio would hear it. "Mrs. Murray asked me to get this message to her husband. His youngest kid is sick—he's very sick. And will Mr. Murray come home immediately? Yeah . . . that's right. The youngest."

Jackie hurried toward the weighing in. Tip Murray would not be on hand in time to stop him from being up on Bad Boy at the starting bell in the fifth. If anything could stop Tip, delay him, that message would.

Jackie heard the roar of the crowd swell to a crescendo, then die away—and he knew another race was over. This thing he was doing was illegal. He had to win now. He had to. If, after what he was doing, he lost— But no other rider could possibly win on Bad Boy. Would Tip understand that?

Jackie's knees trembled as he checked with officials, had his substitution approved. He felt the eyes of the Pinks, the track police, on him.

Bad Boy pranced nervously, irritably, in the paddock. He was ten to one by the moving figures on the tote boards and he was carrying only 114 pounds. Gallant Wise and In-A-Hurry were getting the heavy backing at two to one. They were the figure horses in this race.

"Tip'll be here any minute," Hollie said. His voice quivered. At the first bugle, he gave Jackie a leg up. But he was reluctant to let the horse go without Tip. Bad Boy was jittery, more impatient than he'd ever been.

The second bugle sounded sharply. Horses began moving up the tunnel. Jackie saw the top thoroughbreds, thought of the fat $40,000 prize. Gallant Wise had been a consistent winner at Jamaica, Empire and Aqueduct. In-A-Hurry was yet unbeaten as a three-year-old.

The horses finished their brush around the turn, moved for the starting gate. Bad Boy reared, wildly jerking. The speaker boomed, "They're having trouble with Bad Boy. Bad Boy's in. And he's backed out again! Gallant Wise is in. In-A-Hurry is in. Fleetaway is waiting."

Jackie spoke soothingly to the quivering red.

"Bad Boy is in now!" The tension crackled. "And—*there they go-o-!*"

The large field was away from the barrier in a bunch. Bad Boy had the bit in his teeth. The racers on the outside swung in to the rail. Jackie waited for the clearance, then turned the big red to the rail behind the others. He pocketed him carefully, to slow him, taking the fast track's dirt in his face.

Fleetaway and Gallant Wise surged as they passed the stands. It was Fleetaway by half a length on the rail. Gallant Wise by a head. Rosab and In-A-Hurry. Bad Boy was rucked. Rosab moved up. Fleetaway was through.

It was Rosab and Gallant Wise on the far turn. Bad Boy was stretching. Jackie took him outside, for room, and then Bad Boy was on his way. It was Rosab and Gallant Wise. Bad Boy gave Fleetaway and In-A-Hurry his heels. It was Bad Boy in the third slot.

Bad Boy cocked his head. He took the bit away from Jackie. He was top-dog and he meant to show it. He would not see any horse ahead of him.

Bad Boy made his challenge. He cut to the inside, shouldering Gallant Wise from the rail. Into the stretch—Bad Boy threw every ounce of bone and spirit into the charge. He came abreast of Rosab, drew ahead. He blitzed away his power as he cut to the fore by two lengths.

And then it was Rosab again. Rosab

and Gallant Wise waking up to bid. Jackie didn't have to hold Bad Boy now. Bad Boy was fading. His head was cocked and his eyes were wild. He'd splurged all he had. Rosab cut ahead, showed Bad Boy his streaking tail.

THUNDER drummed in Jackie's brain. He had to win. But who could beat a dog like Rosab today? Bad Boy's agony quivered between Jackie's legs. The wire was ahead, but Bad Boy had no life. Could he do another furlong?

Jackie grasped for the lash. But his fingers stopped short of his boot. He felt Bad Boy's quivering surge. He felt the hollow groan of straining breath rattling from him, as Bad Boy found some last strength.

Rosab was still on top. It was Rosab leveling for the wire. The thunder of other horses overtaking Bad Boy roared in Jackie's splitting brain.

Bad Boy! Bad Boy! This one for Tip! Jackie said that prayer, and he knew the prayer was inside the game red Boy's heart, too.

Bad Boy went after Rosab like a sweat-streaked red phantom. He didn't see the wire. He didn't see anything, know anything; all that was in him was fight. It seemed he must run and run forever, and then the track speaker boomed.

"The winner. It's Bad Boy by half a length! Rosab by three. And Fleetaway."

Jackie swayed, hollow with weakness, dizzy, as he turned back to the judges' stand.

Tip Murray had a fighter. A wonder horse. He'd won himself some money. The money he needed. . . .

Then Jackie saw Tip. The actor's rotund face was yellow-pale and his lips were tight and tense with trouble as he crowded up.

"Jackie," he breathed quickly. "The Pinks. They found the boy tied up in the stable! Don't say—"

Jackie caught his breath. Tip couldn't stand up for him this time. He'd not let him.

"Don't say a word, Jackie," Tip went on. "I told the Pinks it was my orders that you sub. I said the other jock must have given you an argument and you had to put him away."

There was no more time for talking then. Jackie took his honors at the judges' stand numbly. He found Tip as soon as he could afterwards.

"Mr. Murray," he said, taking Tip aside from a woman who was holding Tip's arm. "I'm pulling out. I guess you know what I've done, and maybe why I've done it. Anyway, I don't want to put you on a spot any more. I don't want you to have to go telling stories for me—lies."

Tip Murray straightened. His blue eyes were glowing. "Oh, no," he said. "Bad Boy is a great fighting horse. You showed me that, Jackie." Tip's hand came down in a tight squeeze on Jackie's shoulder. "The guy's half yours now. I want you to ride him in the Santa Rey—and others. And I didn't lie when I told the Pinks I wanted you to ride. My wife was with me when I got your phone call. So I guessed what you were up to; and I did want you to race then, Jackie. For I was sorry for what I'd said to you at the fire. And I knew I wanted you to ride the Boy because I knew you were two of a kind. A little wild maybe. But plenty of heart!"

And suddenly Jackie wondered how, when things were so black, they could all become so bright almost in a twinkling. He tried to think of one thing that was wrong now, but he couldn't. And, suddenly, he found himself grinning, but almost wanting to cry.

"Mr. Murray!" Jackie choked, and Tip reached out and grasped his arm.



Meet Me Under the Grandstand

By George Richmond



When that sharp-eyed grandstand shark saw Tom Mellick at bat for the Grays, he knew something was screwy on the diamond. For a man can't be in two places at once and Tom Mellick was supposed to be in the Army. He wondered what was being double-crossed—Uncle Sam's soldiers or the pennant hopes of the Grays.

THE stocky gray-haired man behind the desk looked up with exasperation. "Quit stuttering, boy, when I ask you a question. You're Mellick, aren't you?"

"Y-yes, sir."

Jeff bit on his lip and cussed himself for going to pieces like a stage-struck schoolboy. He could feel clammy sweat in the palms of his hands and he knew his cheeks must be red as apples. He said:

"I got your wire, Mr. Turner. I'm glad

to be up here. I'll work hard to make good."

The manager nodded. "Whitey Bimm said you'll do. So you must have something. We'll see soon enough once you get out there." He put his hands together and pondered a moment. "Okay, Mellick. Go downstairs and check out a suit. Then report to Hymie Winters for signals."

"Right," Jeff said.

In the hallway he took out a penny postcard and scribbled a note to his brother, Private Tom Mellick, at Camp Grant:

Tom:

Okay, so far. Just talked to Tuffy Turner. He doesn't suspect anything—yet! Wish me luck. And meanwhile, lots of the same to you with those Germans and Japs.

Affectionately, your brother,

JEFF

An hour before game time he'd already met most of his new teammates.

Hansen, the lefty moundsman, introduced him to "Cheeky" Graham, left fielder. The big gardener lived up to his name. He looked Jeff over with swaggering condescension.

"*You're* the Tom Mellick that hit so good in AA last summer?"

There was scorn and amusement in Graham's voice. Jeff saw more than a trace of suspicion, too, in Graham's veiled eyes, and wondered if the big man had somehow been tipped to the screwy setup.

He said, "That's me," and added negligently, "Glad to know you."

"You won't be." Graham's tone was mocking. "You may have been hitting for hell down in double A, but up here is different. *I'm* King Hit on this ball club."

Jeff said, looking straight at him, "Always wanted to meet you, Cheeky, and find out where you picked up that nickname."

The big outfielder flushed. "I blow off some. If a man's good, I say, admit it. The difference between me and some others is I back up what I claim—at the plate."

True, Jeff thought. Cheeky Graham was hitting for .369 with the season half finished. He was a flawless fielder.

Jeff said carefully, I always figured a guy's best bet was to let his actions do *all* his talking for him."

"Yeah?" Graham's voice was heavy. "You'll get your chance, busher."

He got it, all right. When the game started he was out there, patrolling the center pasture. "No use stalling," Tuffy had told him. "You're prob'ly stiff from your long ride, but I gotta find out whether or not we can fit you into this line-up."

"Suits me," Jeff said a bit limply.

The stocky manager looked up at him. "Frankly, you haven't impressed me much, Mellick. You're too jittery, nervous. I know how it is with you kids coming up to the big show. I been through all that. But for Pete's sake, get a hold of yourself before you go out there."

"I'm all right," Jeff said.

"Whitey Bimm said in his wire you were twenty-two. That right, Mellick?"

Jeff felt a pitching sensation in his stomach. He tried to keep his voice from skyrocketing. "I look pretty young for my age, Mr. Turner."

"Look it *and* act it," the manager corrected. "I hope you can handle this job, 'cause we need your hitting. But talk won't help you any. Okay, get out there."

SO he was in there. Playing with the famed Grays, the team he'd dreamed about all through the past six summers. He wanted to pinch himself to make sure it was true, but discarded the gesture as childish.

He was supposed to be twenty-two years old. He didn't look it. But at least he could act it.

Cheeky Graham crouched with his hands on his knees in left field. Jeff watched the big fielder move up as the first Bison strode to the platter. Jeff took his cue from Graham and did likewise.

Graham glanced over. "If you took a real interest in baseball, you'd know these hitters, busher. No matter what league you been playin'."

Jeff winced. It was true what Graham said. It made him look silly in the eyes of the others. But he couldn't blame himself, really. He was no outfielder. For

three years he'd been a hard-hitting first baseman!

Art Hansen, on the mound for the Grays, had a painfully slow delivery that needled the nerves of every man on the diamond.

Jeff went half-crazy with jitters watching him work on the first two Bisons up. But Hansen got them; fanned one and the other popped out to short.

The third man lifted a long high fly toward Jeff's position.

The crack of the bat sent nervous tickles up and down inside his stockings. When he saw it coming, he tried to run, but for a moment he was paralyzed, unable to move.

He got going at last, running forward, then found that in actuality the ball was a long one due to drop over his head.

He took a frantic series of hopping backsteps. He finally flung his glove up and caught it. But he felt lousy. He'd looked like a chump from start to finish on that one. Why deny it?

Trotting in, Cheeky Graham looked over and snorted, "So that's what passes for double A ball these days, eh, Mellick? Sure has changed since I was down there."

Jeff didn't like the guy. Not his cockiness, nor his ugly, oxlike face, nor his patronizing attitude toward the world in general. He was tempted to blow off steam at the big left fielder.

Common sense throttled his tongue. He had not made an outright enemy of Graham. Not yet. And the big man could hurt him. Playing left field, Graham would have plenty of chances to watch him in action, to realize what a phony act Jeff was pulling.

Tuffy Turner had eyes like a hawk. He'd seen all he neded to from the bench, and his eyes were narrow with suspicion.

He didn't say anything. Jeff was thankful. "He's waiting," Jeff decided. "He's curious. He can't quite figure out what goes on. He'll give me the benefit of the doubt—for a while. He won't brace me here with the whole team watching."

Still, the showdown was coming. It had to sooner or later. He watched nervously as the top of the Grays batting order marched to the plate.

Salters, the shortstop, popped out to second. Williams was passed. Hogeland hit safely behind the runner and Williams reached third.

Graham was up, Jeff in the slot. He watched the left fielder take his solid stance at the plate. He had always wondered what technique had produced such terrific power for Graham.

The guy had a long free swing which he started early. He had an unerring eye and he swung with the pliant looseness of a single-arm motion.

The second ball that came to him soared in a low steaming arc over second, climbing. It hit the center wall high.

By the time the Bison fielder took the rebound and pegged in, Graham was perched grinning on third and two runs were in.

Graham's eyes, directed plateward, mocked Jeff as if saying, "Okay, busher. Match that one."

Jeff tapped the rubber. Any hesitancy he'd displayed in the garden abruptly left him. The feel of solid hickory between his fingers was reassuring. He waited for the pitcher's first offering.

It was high and wide. The Bison was wasting one, feeling him out, trying to gauge what kind of ball he liked or didn't.

He couldn't have known that high wide balls were Jeff's special meat. Jeff stepped in fast, swinging.

Crack! There was a nice solid tingle in his palms. He went down to first and rounded the corner. He caught sight of it then. It hit the center wall not ten feet from where Graham's ball had struck. Jeff pulled up conservatively on second, grinning.

"Match that one," Graham's eyes had invited. He sure had matched it!

He died on base, but he'd knocked a run in. And when he came in again for their side of the second, Tuffy Turner's eyes had lost much of their skepticism.

"Nice bingle, Mellick."

He flushed with pleasure at this sign of approval. Not a word from the taciturn Tuffy about his sloppy fielding of that

easy fly in the first. His hit had erased all memory of it, at least for the moment.

If he could keep on hitting that apple and somehow bluff through with his fielding until he picked up the knack, he'd have clear sailing.

He had no more fielding chances till the fifth. It was a high easy ball. He ran up and took it without any trouble. No Bisons on base, so there was no need to peg it. Luck was with him.

He fanned in the third. But in the fifth he knocked out a triple, then came back in the ninth with a single. Three for five. Not bad shooting for a raw rookie who had no right to be up with the Grays in the first place!

HE TROTTED along the runway beside Cheeky Graham. He felt good. He felt fine. And then a voice floated out from the grandstand and hit him with the impact of a bullet.

"Jeff! Jeff Mellick!"

He was afraid to look up. It seemed impossible that anybody here, so far from home, could know him. And yet— He rushed a glance toward the voice, saw a frantic hand waving, its owner excitedly scrambling through the crowd to overtake him.

Jeff did not know the man. But the man knew him and to that situation there was only one answer.

He stopped and turned toward the exit through which his unrecognized friend was coming.

He saw Cheeky Graham glance back with a curious frown, then stroll on toward the lockers. Then a plump little man with a red, perspiring face had hold of his hand, pumping furiously.

"Jeff, you young son—"

"Not Jeff, *Tom*. Tom Mellick, Mr.—" He paused significantly.

The plump man looked hurt. "You remember me. Mr. Nolan? Why I sold your dad policies for all you kids, Tom." He looked nonplussed. "Could've sworn you were Jeff. Never forget a face. Can't afford to, y'know. Not selling insurance."

Jeff took the plump man's elbow and led him aside. "Look, can you keep a secret, Mr. Nolan? It's—important."

The man beamed. "That's another thing a man learns in this business. How to forget things that might—uh—inconvenience certain clients."

His hand was moving automatically toward his vest pocket. Jeff envisaged the neat business card that was undoubtedly forthcoming, along with a well-rehearsed spiel.

"Look, Mr. Nolan. I'll be honest with you. I *am* Jeff Mellick."

Nolan's plump cheeks jerked. "I—I don't understand. In the program it was Tom who—"

"That's just it. Tom's listed; I played the ball game. That's why you'll have to help me keep this thing quiet until I can prove I belong in the Grays' line-up."

Shock and amazement burned in the insurance man's eyes. "You mean, they think you're your brother? You're posing as Tom!"

"That's right."

"But that's wrong! Why, it's even Tom's name in the contract. That's fraud, boy. I know these things. You could be prosecuted. Why, you'd go to *jail!*"

The horror with which he invested the word was contagious. Jeff said impatiently," I know. I figured the angles before I came up here. The thing is, if I make good, the club won't press charges against me. If I don't—well, I'll worry about that when I come to it."

"But—"

"All I'm asking you," Jeff said in a cold voice, "is will you keep my secret or won't you?"

Nolan had the tough hide of his brethren in the insurance business, but there was no mistaking Jeff's tone.

"Why, it's none of my business. Naturally, I won't say anything to anyone about it." He looked up shrewdly. The mantle of friendly good-fellowship fell off him. "I wouldn't have hailed you if I'd known the story. Matter of fact, I was wondering how you're fixed for insurance. A young fellow like you can't become insurance-conscious too soon. A ball player especially."

The man's little eyes bored at him. There was an insinuation in his attitude as he stood there, in his very appearance.

Jeff saw the ultimatum. A bit of respectable blackmail was indicated. Buy my wares in return for my silence, Nolan's bright black eyes suggested.

Jeff hesitated. It was a ticklish problem, a tough decision.

If he failed to make good for the club, they could prosecute and send him to jail. He'd known he was doing wrong, but he'd never carried the thought through quite *that* far.

The big question was, would Nolan really keep quiet if Jeff took the hint and bought a policy from him?

No, he decided he couldn't trust Nolan. The man was a phony, else why would he be spending a perfectly good working day out at the ball game? Jeff tried to make it appear that he hadn't understood Nolan's meaning.

"I'm all booked up," he said. "Got more right now than I can handle."

Which was entirely false, but might fit, with some squeezing, into a white lie classification.

"I'm glad to have seen you again, Mr. Nolan."

He turned away and went swiftly toward the showers. Nolan was sure to be sore. He'd break the story sooner or later, Jeff realized glumly. All he could do meanwhile was prove himself capable of fulfilling Tom's contract!

WHEN he got inside, most of the team had left. Jeff showered and Cheeky Graham alone remained in the room with him. The big man said meaningly:

"Yeah, I waited special. Who was that guy called you? Called you Jeff, didn't he?"

"I'd say that's my business, Graham."

"Maybe it is. Maybe not. There's somethin' damn funny about you, busher. The way you took that fly ball in the first, for instance. Then this. It don't kosher up, if you ask me."

It was on Jeff's tongue to tell him off, tell him to stick it. He decided not to. He decided it would be foolish to get Graham down on him. The guy was too close to the right answer for comfort. Jeff thought, *I need this guy with me. He can hurt me.*

"I was nervous when I caught that ball, Graham. As for the guy callin' me Jeff—that used to be my nickname. Back home."

Graham was stolidly nodding agreement, but his eyes were like oysters. He still wasn't satisfied, Jeff saw.

"Look," Jeff said, "you and I got off to a pretty bad start. Maybe it's my fault. I dunno. Maybe I was lookin' for trouble. If so, I'm sorry. Whadda you say? No hard feelings."

He put his hand out. Graham looked down in silence at it, not moving.

"Somethin's stewin' on your mind, or you wouldn't be makin' up to me."

Jeff just shrugged, a tired gesture. Graham said:

"You're up to somethin'. I don't know what. If it was all above board, you'd be talkin' about it. You ain't. The only answer is you're pullin' a swifty somewheres. If it's anything to do with this ball club, to ruin our chances to cop that pennant—" he paused, emphasizing the last "—well, these guys are out for their series money. It'll be hot for you, busher."

He snapped his locker door shut with a bang and walked out. Jeff looked after him, musing. Nolan, the insurance man, was onto him, might squawk any moment. Graham was hot on the scent. If Nolan did spill the beans, or if Graham came up with the right answer, Jeff would be up to his neck in trouble. Serious trouble. He wished Nolan hadn't mentioned that jail business.

He put in a rotten night tossing for hours on the hotel bed. Going out on the field the next day, he looked and felt rocky. Tuffy Turner said worriedly:

"What's wrong, Mellick? You look like you slept in a coal pile."

"I'm okay, Mr. Turner."

"I hope so. Keep on nudging 'em out like yesterday an' this club is a cinch for the pennant."

It was a thought. He carried it with him out to the garden. They wanted his hitting. His fielding was secondary. He wasn't such a fraud really, if he could keep on hitting.

He had to prove himself fast. That was the most important angle.

Cheeky Graham looked over at him as the game got started.

"Okay, busher. Let's make like a fielder today."

Jeff didn't answer. Graham would be watching him. That was apparent. It would not do to look silly again. The big guy was no dumbbell.

Bucky Welliver had the hill for the home team. The compactly built right hander was a strong starter, but usually faded in the closing innings.

He did today. Jeff had his first fielding chance in the third stanza, a low, screaming ball that threatened to ride right over him.

He turned and ran toward the wall. He glanced back and saw the ball not ten feet from him. He leaped, stabbed his glove at all, and was rewarded by the solid smack of the ball in his mitt.

There was a hand from the bleacherites for him. It warmed him inside. Even Graham could find no fault with him. He could bluff this thing through, he decided.

He singled in the third. There were no men on base and it didn't result in a counter. But it looked good on paper, which was plenty important.

He struck out in the fifth. The game to that point was scoreless. Tuffy Turner was begging for runs. He didn't get them.

In the eighth the Bisons started to get Bucky. The kid was tired. He was still serving up steam as he had from the stars and the Bisons were finding his fast one.

A single, a walk and a sacrifice bunt put men on second and third. One down.

STREETER, the Bisons' heavy hitter, was up. On the bench, Tuffy was casting anxious glances from the mound to the bull pen.

Jeff glanced sideward and saw Graham moving in. Jeff frowned. He recalled Streeter as a swing away hitter who seldom aimed for a pocket but preferred to belt them. It didn't make sense for Graham to be moving in now.

Still, Jeff followed. Graham hadn't been six years in the league for nothing, he reasoned.

He was moving up when the staccato crack of the bat met his eardrums. He saw the ball rising in a low arc over second. He swore violently under his breath as he turned and dug in for the wall.

He had never run so fast in his life. When the crowd roar warned him, he looked back and jumped. Too late!

It hit the wall waist high and caromed through his clutching fingers. He had to run a full ten yards to capture the roller. In his mind's eye he could see what a picture he made, falling all over himself chasing the rebound.

He picked it up and heaved to second. To top things off, his throw fell short and was off the target. The hitter made third and two runs romped in for the Bisons.

Bucky Welliver tightened gamely to retire the side with no further casualties. The fact remained that Jeff's lack of judgment in fielding that clout had practically lost them this ball game.

Why had Graham gone in for Streeter, sucking Jeff out of position? Coincidence? Hardly, he decided.

The thought didn't help his hitting. He whiffed again in the ninth. One for five, and he blamed himself for the final score, 2-0, favor the Bisons.

Tuffy Turner gave him a bleak stare and said, "Come up to the office, Mellick, soon as you're showered."

"Yes, sir."

He didn't like the way Tuffy had said it. He dressed quickly, brooding about it, wondering what the manager had to say that called for the privacy of his inner sanctum. It had to be something important.

When he got upstairs, the manager picked up a piece of paper with typing on it, and handed it to him.

"What's all this about, Mellick?"

Jeff took it and scanned it nervously. It said:

Dear Mr. Turner:

As a long time Grays fan I feel duty bound to suggest that you ask your new center fielder about his insurance.

A LOYAL SUPPORTER

Nice going, Nolan, Jeff thought. Cute. He tried to keep his face from displaying emotion. This, of course, would be Nolan's way of showing he didn't intend to take Jeff's short treatment of him lying down. There had to be one or two lice like Nolan in any business.

Tuffy Turner was awaiting an answer. Jeff said, "Somebody must have a sense of humor."

"Practical joker?"

"That's what it looks like to me, Mr. Turner."

The manager stared at him. Jeff's glance wavered under the steady gray eyes. The manager said:

"You didn't look so good in there today. You're nervous. That shouldn't be, Mellick; a player with all your experience."

"I know. I'll steady down soon."

"You better. This is no charity ball club. I like to carry you kids all I can, but my big job is winning ball games. You've got to help me to do it. That's all I ask of a player."

Jeff nodded. "That's fair enough."

"You flopped today." The manager was gentle but definite. "We lost a ball game. It's too late in the season to take chances. If you come through tomorrow, okay. If you flop, I'll have to send for another fielder."

Jeff stood there in bleak silence.

"All right," Tuffy said. "That's all, I guess."

Outside, Jeff thought it over. One more chance. One game in which to prove himself a player. It seemed unfair. They were putting him on the spot. But in a way, it was lucky.

He would ignore Nolan's message. Tomorrow was his big chance to earn that center field spot fairly squarely. Then he'd made a clean breast of things to Tuffy Turner.

THE last Bison game in the current series produced a big crowd. Jeff was a tight-strung bundle of nerves in the opening innings. But he handled two fielding chances okey in the second. That settled him down a little.

Going in for the home half of the third, he heard a familiar voice from the grandstand.

"Tom! Tom Mellick!"

He spotted the pudgy insurance man, Nolan, down near the bottom tier. As his eyes met Nolan's, the man's face creased in a sardonic grin.

Cheeky Graham said in a voice fraught with meaning, "Seems to have forgotten your nickname, Mellick."

"Nuts!" Jeff said. He was nervous. It was his turn at the plate. He went out and the ball came down toward him. All he could see was Nolan's fat face grinning at him. He swung three times and trudged back to the dugout.

Tuffy Turner chewed on his gum and said nothing. He could not have been more eloquent, Jeff thought, if he'd shouted at him. The Grays went down in order.

Jeff went out to pasture again. Cheeky Graham said, "You looked pretty, busher. What were you swinging at, mosquitoes?"

Jeff said, "You kill me, big shot."

A ball came at him. He was still thinking about Nolan. He misjudged the ball, muffed it. His frantic peg went over the sack. The Bison runner took second.

They made a run on the strength of his error. Going in, Graham said, "Take a good look around, kiddo. Nice field, ain't it? May be your last look."

"Stuff it," Jeff said. He was getting fed to the gills with Graham's wisecracks. It came to him that he was finished, washed up, after today's lousy showing. He said:

"I've been taking your lip because I had to. I don't any longer. I'll see you after the ball game, windbag."

Graham's eyes glinted. His jaw was working. "It'll be a pleasure, busher."

Hogeland went out and punched a single over the Bison third sacker. Graham poled one to the wall for two bases, Hogeland holding at third.

Jeff went out and smashed recklessly at the first ball pitched to him. Suprisingly, it went for a single. Hogeland romped in. Graham held at third. Moffat, pinch-hitting for Dobson, knocked Graham in. The Bisons tightened and held

them then, but it was 2-1, favor the Grays.

They played even-up ball till the seventh when a Bison homer evened the tally.

Jeff scratched out a hit in the sixth, but it went for nothing.

It looked like a drawn-out tie game in the offing. Going into the ninth, it was still 2-2. Hansen, pitching relief for Dobson, put them down one-two-three, and the Grays came up for their big chance to finish things quickly.

Salters was up. He fanned the ozone three times and returned to the dugout. Williams did likewise. Hogeland got hit by a wild one and took base. But with two down, the rooters didn't perk up very much.

Graham was up, which worried the Bison hurler plenty. He walked Graham to get at Jeff. Tuffy Turner said quietly:

"He figures you're easy. Go out and show him he's wrong."

The gentle tone of the manager's voice surprised him. Could it be that Tuffy hadn't yet counted him out of the picture? He wondered.

Tuffy was square. Jeff took a tight grip on his bat. If he came through now in the clutch, it would swing a lot of weight with Tuffy Turner. The manager had always been strong for money players.

The pitcher tried to get him to nibble at a low one. He didn't budge. The man on the mound studied him, let go with a curve. It looked close and Jeff held fire, hoping the guy would pitch himself into a pocket.

Strike. One and one. The next ball was wide and high, where he liked them. But he let it go by for another ball.

The minute the next one left the pitcher's hand, he could see it had nothing on it. The hurler had pulled the string, afraid of missing.

Jeff swung mightily. He felt the solid tingle of a hard hit ball in his hands. It rode out to left field, rising. The fielder ran to the wall, then threw up his glove in despair. It was too high for him.

Jeff wound on second. Hogeland was romped in with the winning run and the game was over.

IN THE showers, Tuffy Turner buttonholed him. "All right, kid. Let's have it."

"Have what?"

"The whole story. Where's your brother? And why'd you come up here on his contract?"

"You—you knew? All the—"

"I've known since last night. That letter I got seemed a little too cute for a practical joke. And Graham said you were acting damn funny. I made a few phone calls. Your brother's in the Army."

Jeff said weakly, "The draft board couldn't decide which of us they wanted. We both play ball, so when they called Tom we figured one of the Mellick tribe had a tryout coming if Tom gave up his chance to go in the Army. Honest, I thought I could make good."

"Make good as a center fielder. And you a first baseman!"

So he knew that, too. Tom sighed.

"I knew the hitting was most important. I was hitting good—in the minors."

The manager stood musing. "You've hit good up here. That's why I used you today—after I found out you'd tricked me. This club needs a good hitter."

Jeff said hopefully, "Give me a break. I'm sorry I tricked you. But it was the only way I could wangle a tryout. I'll work hard, Mr. Turner."

The stocky man stood with his eyes half-closed, trying to reach a decision.

"Well, you've been nervous as a cat. This thing had you worried. Maybe—you *might* come around, Hymie could show you some tricks about fielding."

"You'll do it?" Jeff gulped. "You'll let me stay on?"

"Didn't say that," the manager snapped. "Have to keep you awhile though, till I get someone better. I dunno. The thing *might* plan out."

Jeff moved toward the door.

"Hey," Tuffy called, "where you going?"

"Got a date with Graham under the grandstand."

"Lay off that, Mellick, if you wanta stay on this ball club."

Jeff hesitated. "Okay, then. I'll see a guy named Nolan about some insurance."

Uncle Sam proved that a good man in a sports arena can also be champion in . . . .

The Toughest Fight

By Ned Cady



THE Guadalcanal jungle was steamy wet that night. In the limestone foxholes the moisture clung in droplets to the cold face of the rock, making a man want to stand clear if he were able to stand up, increasing his discomfort if he had to lie down.

In one of those foxholes was a fighter. His name was Barney Ross. Barney had been lightweight, junior welterweight, and welterweight champion of the world.

The tiny position was cut off from the main Yankee lines. Japs howled in the bushes, trying to draw fire, working on the nerves of the Marines, wanting to wear the men out so they would be easy to capture or kill.

But Barney Ross was no sucker for that sort of racket. Barney had been feinted out of position by the best men of his day. He knew what it meant to block a fake lead and get bopped on the whiskers by a tape-wound fist for his foolishness. And what he would be struck by if he lost his head this time, would be more damaging than any fist.

The night wore on. Overhead were the brilliant tropical stars, glowing like the distant lights of a peacetime city if anyone could see them through the matted branches of the dripping trees. Here and there a covey of Pacific Island lightning bugs glowed white against the angry red flashes of the rifle and machinegun fire.

An exploding hand grenade might light up the trees for the brief instant of its flash, and the flame of a burning bomber might add the candle power of a thousand gallons of gasoline to such other light as filtered through those slimy branches. But the light was one of brief and dim shadows at best. A light which favored the side with the most men and the Japs outnumbered the Yanks by more than ten to one.

Barney Ross did not let this bother him. Barney was used to being half-blinded by the smothering speed of boxing gloves coming at his eyes. Barney was known as the famous "tunnel fighter." It was Barney who said, "I'll let a Fancy Dan blind me all night with his speed if I have to, for sooner or later through the tangle of his arms, I'll see a tunnel to his jaw, and then I will swing through it and knock him silly."

Dozens of fighters had let Barney see such a tunnel and had lain quietly on the floor of the ring while the referee tolled off the ten count which always followed the Barney Ross right-cross to the button.

This time it was Japs who were leaving the tunnels. Japs with their sneaky snakelike tactics as they wormed their way toward that foxhole. But Barney saw his tunnels. He let go with the kind of knockout punches which will last forever.

And in the morning, when the main

body of Marines could see well enough to clear the Japs out of their way. Barney and his two wounded comrades were rescued. It put Barney in line for the Edward J. Neil Trophy which is voted annually by the Boxing Writers' Association of New York to the man who has done the most for boxing during the past year.

A USUAL incident, you say? A great athlete turning into a great hero?

Most heroes are just ordinary fellows, although nearly all of them have the famous American athletic sense to help them on.

Take Lieutenant James V. Edmondsen for example.

Edmondsen was an athlete all right, but at Santa Monica Junior College. No one ever called him a world's champion while he was there, and no big newspaper wrote up his feats, for Santa Monica just does not rate that kind of publicity.

But football is a hard, bruising contact game at Santa Monica just as it is at Yale or Notre Dame. The Santa Monica man gets up and conceals from his own teammates, as well as from the opposition, the bump which makes it hard for him to run, just as the Chicago Bears player does. The battle of the punt and pass demands its self sacrificing teamplay everywhere.

And so Lieutenant Edmondsen, who had become a Navy flyer, found himself at Pearl Harbor on Sunday morning of December 7th, 1941. Hell was raining from the skies and Jap planes, their brown-skinned pilots grinning with pure happiness, flew at almost ground level so their machine guns would get more level sweeps across the fields.

Something hit Lieutenant Edmondsen. He went down, knocked cold. He will bear the scar of it all his life. But in a few minutes he got up again. He stayed on the job all through that day, thinking nothing of the risks he took with his life, taking every possible part in the fight which the surprised Yanks were putting up. He was a football player, getting up and concealing his hurt and going on with the game. Just an ordinary player from a small school, but taking part in the biggest game of all and taking his part well.

How well? A few weeks later he was flying on the Hawaiian patrol, protecting our shipping. He sighted a periscope just breaking water off the island of Oahu.

Periscopes do not come up and stay long during the daytime. They break the surface, take a quick look around, and duck back under the cover of the sea within a few seconds.

But here was a chance that a football man could understand. Many a time Edmondsen had seen a brief opening in an interference through which a tackler could dive and get the runner if he acted immediately.

Edmondsen acted on that periscope. He sank the sub. And for this and other acts of heroism, this ordinary athlete who never made the headlines has been awarded the Order of the Purple Heart.

Lieutenant Commander Henry G. Sanchez is another of these boys. This player was called "Mike" in his athletic days at Curtis High School on Staten Island, and when a fellow gets called "Mike" by his pals, you know at once what kind of a swell guy he is to have around.

Mike went to Annapolis after high school. And in the Naval Academy, like many another high school star, he found that he did not have the physical equipment to make the major sports teams.

This did not stop Mike. He played soccer for his outdoor sport and made the swimming and water polo teams indoors.

Soccer and water polo have two big things in common. You have to know how to be at the right spot at the right time, and you have to do something about the play when you get there.

Mike carried those sports habits right into his Naval flying days. He was on the *Wasp* on her trip to Malta. He is said to have been aboard two of our aircraft carriers which were sunk in action in the Pacific. And in these engagements he has done so well that Admiral Halsey has decorated him with the Distinguished Service Medal and the Flying Cross.

Mat Monster

By Norman Talley



They called Stan "The Gargoyle" because of his war scars. But when they tried to get him to accept a back-crushing mat defeat, they forgot that a man who could break a Nazi death grip won't flinch from a wrestling crook's hammerlock.

STAN KALAKOWSKI ambled down the street, his big bulk swaying like a ponderous bear. His hamlike hands hung near his knees, his broad shoulders took up half the sidewalk.

He stopped at the corner for a newspaper. The dealer flapped the snow off a top paper and thrust it at him. Stan extended a coin. The dealer reached for it, looked up and his eyes went wide.

"The Gargoyle!" he whispered.

Stan's face split. Stumps of teeth protruded from his gums. The horrible mass of wrinkles and scars on his twisted face crinkled into a leer. The newsdealer quickly busied himself at the far end of the stand.

Stan shrugged. He dropped the coin on the papers and kept moving. A gang of boys were having a Solomons battle all of their own across the street. They spied Stan. The raging snowball battle came to a halt. The boys stared at Stan.

One of them stuck out his tongue and shouted, "Yah, Gargoyle! I hope you get the rest of your face pushed in tonight!"

Stan grimaced and waved his hand. The boys mistook it for a challenge. One of them pitched an icy snowball. His aim was good. It splatted against Stan's jaw.

The split on Stan's face broadened into an ugly leer.

The boys pelted him with snowballs. Stan turned towards them and they scattered frantically. He shrugged and kept on walking. Strange boys, they did not wish to be friendly. He would have told them they threw well if he knew enough English. It was good they threw so well. They could kill many Nazis with hand grenades.

He kept on walking towards the Arena and his heart was heavy. If people would only look at his eyes they would see the twinkle in them and realize he meant the splitting of his face to be a smile, not a leer. But people never got close enough to The Gargoyle to see his eyes.

It was five miles from his cheap hotel to the Arena. He walked the whole distance. He made more money wrestling than he ever thought he would make in his life. But he was broke. There were a lot of people who needed the money more than he did. Half of what he made went into a refugee fund, the other half went to a fund for the Polish Army.

Jake Hertzog was waiting for him in the dressing room. Hertzog had a thin sharp face and he always chewed gum. It made him look like a blue pike hungrily eyeing a smaller fish. Hertzog scowled at the clock. He growled:

"Wotta hell kept you so long, you dumb yap?"

Stan looked at him blankly. He did not understand most of what his manager said. But one thing he knew. Hertzog was bad. He was like a Nazi. He was no better than a beast.

Stan undressed and said, "Me win dis time?"

"Ah!" sneered Hertzog. "Shut up." He turned to a hanger-on and said, "The halfwit don't know it, but he's all washed up tonight. We built him up and tonight we're gonna dump him—if there's anything left when Crusher Carter gets through with him."

He laughed. Stan did not like that laugh. It sounded like a croak. He had heard laughs like that before. It had not been good. He did not know what Hertzog was saying, but he did not like that either.

A neatly dressed man with a light face and blond hair came in. Stan's face split. He grabbed his hand and jabbered a string of Polish at him. It was the interpreter Hertzog got to give Stan instructions.

Hertzog snapped, "Tell the bum he fights Crusher Carter tonight. Carter is the best in the game. The Gargoyle loses tonight."

The interpreter relayed the news to Stan. Stan frowned. He jabbered something at the interpreter. The interpreter said to Hertzog, "He says you say he wins, he wins. Always you say he wins, always he wins. Why must he now lose?"

HERTZOG said, "Ah, you wouldn't understand. It's a game, see? When Carter beats the Gargoyle, then takes the champ, the Gargoyle gets a return match with Carter. More dough, see? For both of 'em." There was a crafty gleam in his eyes.

The interpreter told that to Stan. Stan's frown deepened. He had wrestled in the old country. Fairly. He did not understand this. The interpreter explained Hertzog said it was a game. The Americans liked their wrestling that way.

Stan shrugged. He nodded his head. He understood. If they liked it that way—. He had seen a lot of things in the three years he had been in the United States which puzzled him. Especially in the wrestling game. He did not like them, but the others said nothing.

The interpreter left and Hertzog turned to his friend and said, "Buck Williams, the champ, is next." He made a breaking motion with his hands and laughed.

Stan's eyes glinted. He had caught the name Buck Williams. He understood Hertzog's motion with his hands. It began to add up for him. Buck Williams was a good boy. Stan had wrestled him. He had been careful not to hurt Buck. They said Buck was going to join the Marines.

That was good. He could kill Nazis

with his bare hands. Buck beat him squarely. Stan later saw Buck win the championship. Hertzog and the men around him did not like Buck. It proved Buck was a good boy.

Stan sensed the rest. Carter could never defeat Buck in a fair bout. But Carter did not fight fair. He would use every dirty trick in the book against Buck. The referee would let him get away with it, or there would be serious trouble for him and his family later.

Stan nodded to himself. The referee would let Crusader Carter win over Buck.

Stan said, "Me lose dis time?"

Hertzog said, "Now you get the idea, stupid. C'mon, drag your hack into the ring."

Stan went down the aisle with Hertzog. A concerted roar of boos greeted him. He waved his hand. He did not mind the boos. Always the people booed him. It was Hertzog's work. They considered him bad because of his face. They did not understand.

Stan vaulted into the ring. He was proud of the lightness in his feet. He was very fast for such a big man. The Nazis had found that out. The fans booed him to the rafters.

Carter came into the ring. The crowd cheered.

"Slug him silly!" yelled a fan.

"Hit him with the ringposts, Carter!"

"Dropkick him dizzy!"

Stan surveyed his opponent from the opposite corner. Carter was barrel-chested and swarthy. He was a tough man in the ring. But Stan was not afraid. Carter did not have a rifle and a bayonet.

He waited patiently for the announcer to get through, then the referee called them to the center of the ring. The cheering for Carter was drowned out by the rumbling boo for Stan.

Stan did not know what the referee was saying. It made no difference to him. He went back to his corner and waited. He looked towards the ringside seats and saw Buck Williams.

Stan's face split. He waved. Buck Williams smiled and waved back. "Go get him, Stan!" he called.

Stan jerked his head. He looked at Hertzog and the eager light died in his eyes. Hertzog said he must lose tonight.

THE gong clanged. Stan came out lightly. Carter rushed out scowling. He knocked Stan's probing hand aside and slammed him in the jaw with a rocky fist.

Stan went back off balance. He grimaced, but was not hurt. Hertzog told him to pretend always he was hurt. The people liked it better that way. Stan did not ask why, he did what Hertzog told him. He needed that money very much. A wild yell rose from the crowd. Hertzog was right, people liked it when they thought Stan was hurt.

"Get him, Carter!" yelled the crowd.

Carter launched a flying tackle. Stan whirled and Carter spun off on his belly. Carter jumped to his feet and rushed him. Stan gave him the Irish whip. Carter banged against the mat. Stan made no effort to follow up. The crowd booed.

Carter frowned at his corner and got up. His manager jerked a thumb down. It was the signal for Carter to finish it as fast as he could.

Carter feinted at the knees, then grabbed Stan around the neck. Stan dodged, but not fast enough. Two iron hands gripped his neck and squeezed. Stan choked and struggled to break loose. The cruel pressure tightened. Stan looked at the referee with bulging eyes. The referee's face was blank.

Stan's head roared, his tongue swelled. The ring swam before him. Through the pounding in his head he could hear the excited yapping of the crowd. He fought against the dizziness which tried to engulf him. He couldn't let Carter choke him into weakness. Carter would then shift to an orthodox hold and slam him unconscious. He could see that in Carter's gloating eyes.

Stan sagged to his knees. Carter's grip loosened. Stan suddenly grabbed Carter's right forearm, yanked and jammed a shoulder upwards. Carter lurched towards him, slammed into the upthrust shoulder and sailed over Stan's back. He hit the mat on his back.

Stan scrambled after him. Carter got

to his knees shaken. Stan pounced on him and deftly flipped Carter over. It was one fall to a finish. He put the pressure on Carter's shoulders.

Carter bridged. He aimed a vicious kick at Stan's face. Stan jerked his head aside and the kick grazed his jaw. Carter bridged desperately and kept threshing with his feet. The crowd booed. Slowly, slowly, Stan's shoulders moved forward and down.

Carter was strong, much stronger than Stan thought. He would cripple Buck for life when they met in the ring. That could not be. Stan knew Buck was a better wrestler, he deserved to be the champ. Carter would win with dirty wrestling. He was one of Hertzog's men. They should be treated like Nazis.

The muscles in Stan's huge shoulders bulged. Sweat broke out on his forehead. He pushed against Carter with everything he had. Carter shot a desperate look at the referee. If he lost, Carter would not get a crack at Buck Williams for a long time.

The referee circled. His face was frantic. Stan knew he was waiting for a chance to break it up and give Carter another chance. Stan increased the pressure. His face moved close to Carter's.

Something sharp suddenly gouged into Stan's left eye. A million lights exploded before him and lightning pain streaked through his eye and throbbed in his head. He held on, gritting his teeth and waited for the referee to call the foul.

The referee made no motion. The pressure against Stan's eyeball increased. He held on as long as he could against the grinding pain, then jerked his head back. Carter kicked against Stan's chest at the same time and Stan flew backwards.

Carter jumped up with a snarl and rushed him. Stan held a hand over his flaming eye and kept his right hand in front of him. Carter clubbed a closed fist to Stan's jaw, then grabbed him by the waist and tripped him to the mat.

Stan laid there stunned. Something heavy landed on his chest. Stan automatically bridged. The referee hovered over them, an anxious arm ready to clap Carter on the shoulder.

CARTER pressed until his face turned from a livid red to blue. Stan fought back with every ounce of strength in his giant body.

"Get the Gargoyle!" yelled the hysterical fans. "Get him!"

The veins in Carter's forehead stood out. The referee crouched over them, his eyes glued on the small distance between Stan's shoulders and the mat.

Carter gave an extra shove and Stan went rigid. He gritted his teeth and battled against the increased pressure. He could not lose. He must not lose. He had to win for Buck Williams. He had to break this hold and make sure he did not give Carter another chance to cripple him.

Stan lifted upward with every last bit of strength he could muster. Carter must not cripple him, he vowed grimly. Stan had to go back and fight the Nazis. Fight the Nazis in Poland like he had that September in 1939 when the world came to an end.

It would be different now. General Sikorski and his Polish divisions were equipped with the most modern weapons. And the Americans were in it now.

It would not be like it was in 1939 when the Nazis had captured him at the head of a dazed, bewildered company of soldiers. The Nazis did not like the stubborn resistance of his company. They made an example of Captain Stanley Kalakowski to his men. They pounded rifle butts against his face, beat him over the head and then threw him into a roadside ditch to die like a dog.

It would be different now. He was ready, he was strong again. He had to go back to fight the Nazis. He would get revenge for the people in his village. His beloved Manya and many others were no longer alive. Manya had been considered too pretty by the Nazi officers to die right away.

Rage brought a hidden reservoir of strength to the surface. Stan gave a superhuman shove upward and Carter flew off him. Stan jumped to his feet with a dark face.

Hertzog pounded the ring apron. "You

sap!" he hissed. "What ya tryin' to do?"

Stan ignored him. He came straight for Carter. Carter backed away with fear in his eyes. Stan grabbed his arm. Carter tried to punch him, and Stan grabbed his other arm. He pulled Carter towards him and held him in a crushing bear hug.

Carter's eyes popped wide with pain. His mouth opened in a cry. Stan stifled the cry with an extra squeeze. He crushed until his arms felt as if they would snap. Sweat ran down his face. The stunned crowd sat silent.

The referee stared at them with a bewildered look on his face. Stan gave a final squeeze, something cracked and Carter slumped in his arms. Stan took his arms away and Carter dropped to the mat and was motionless.

The hushed crowd came to life with a thunderous chorus of boos. Stan faced them panting. Buck Williams jumped to his feet and faced the audience with a snarl. He banged his hands together in applause. The crowd was puzzled. The champ was applauding the Gargoyle. What was going on?

It took them a while to get it, but what was good enough for the champ was good enough for them. The booing decreased. The applause got louder. The booing almost disappeared.

Buck Williams faced the ring and shouted, "Attaboy, Stan!"

Someone near him took up the cheer. It spread. The fickle crowd saw the light. After all, the Gargoyle had put up a good bout at that. Maybe he wasn't such a bad guy in spite of his ugly face.

Stan listened to them and tears glistened in his eyes. They were cheering for him. They were cheering him for the first time since he had come to America. He waved his hand, his face started to split. He hesitated, then unashamedly brushed aside the tears of gladness which coursed down his cheeks.

He climbed out of the ring and Hertzog came up with a snarl. "You double-crossin' rat!" He pulled something short and black out of his pocket.

Stan's left arm swept out like a bear's paw. It caught Hertzog under the jaw and knocked him into the third row of seats.

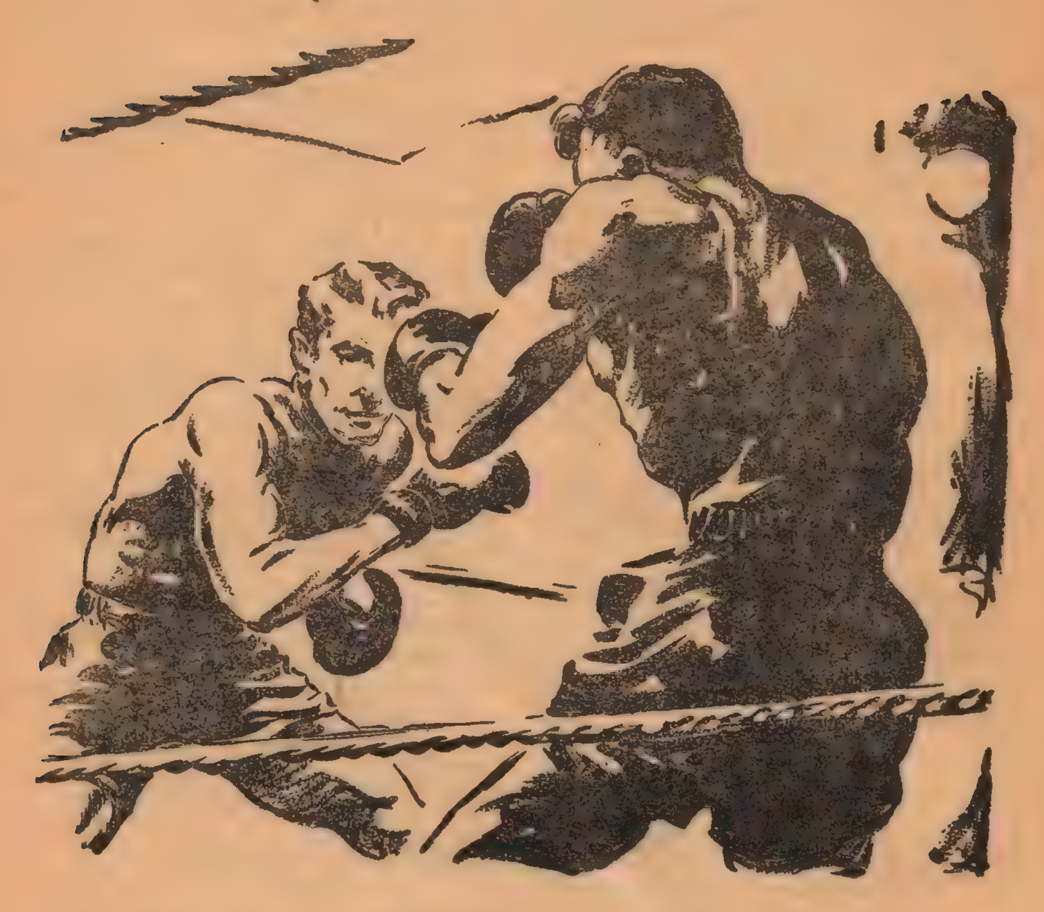
Stan grabbed Buck Williams' hand and said, "You goot boy, Bock. You go keel Nazis; I go, too. Mebbe sometime we meet in Poland."

Williams held his hand in a firm grip. He said, "I hope I can get at least half as many as you do, Stan!"

Stan's face split and Williams smiled right back at him.

Date With the Canvas

By Dale Cochrane



Buddy Jenkins came East to join his big brother in a two-ring boxing carnival. Instead, he found his brother a worthless setup stooge. And the big show was going to find Buddy, raw and inexperienced, pinch-hitting against a twelve-time kayo artist.

BUDDY JENKINS got off the bus at the Fiftieth Street station and cold shivers of fright ran up and down his spine. He was scared by New York swirling all about him. And the panic of shame squeezed at his stomach. He was ashamed of what his big brother Jimmy would think when he saw him.

Buddy looked down at his pants, baggy as a flour sack after six days of riding—all the way from Los Angeles. He rubbed his palm alongside his jaw to feel for beard. There was no beard, but he felt dirty and grimy. And big brother Jimmy was always sharp. A sartorial Adonis!

Buddy searched the crowd milling about him, peered into faces. But he didn't see Jimmy. He wondered if Jimmy had

got his telegram. Buddy collected his valise and stepped outside. His heart did a somersault. There, down the block, was Madison Square Garden—the very center of the fight game!

It had been years since he'd seen it!

Buddy grinned. He knew he was gawking like a kid and that if brother Jimmy saw him now, brother Jimmy would get a laugh. That was the way it had always been. Him, the kid—the little punk. And Jimmy, his big brother—the big-shot on top of the world. Jimmy had laughed that time, three years and a half ago it was now, since he'd sprung that on Jim about wanting to be a fighter.

"You—a pug, a fancy cauliflower?" Jimmy laughed in great spirit. "Forget it, kid! I got plenty dough. I'll send you to college. Make you a doctor or something. Something with class. You want to take the girls out, show 'em a good time? Here. Here—this'll take care of it."

And he peeled a twenty-smacker killer-diller off his bankroll.

He'd laughed at Buddy's wanting to be one of the busted-beak boys because he remembered how it was back in the old days down on Avenue A, when he'd had to take care of his little brother Buddy, with all the tough-monkey boys scrapping around and raising hell out in the streets. It didn't occur to him Buddy had grown up.

But now it was later and Buddy was back in town for a feature go, in his own right, against a comer known as Al Wyatt out at Coney Island. Maybe Buddy was not as good as Jimmy, who was still right up near the top of Buddy's own division. Jimmy was due to fight Tom Slatterty. And the winner was to be entered in a championship elimination run by the Garden!

Buddy looked at the cars parked at the curb. Maybe Jimmy was here. Jimmy used to have a spiffy white-tired LaSalle.

Buddy's head was down and he walked right into a man coming out of the Eighth Avenue subway. It took Buddy a long moment to realize the man had been walking up to him. That the man was—

"Jimmy!" Buddy gasped.

Jimmy said, "Hiya, keed. Long time no see. Sorry to have kept you waiting."

He gripped Buddy's arm, warm, friendly. Buddy looked at him hungrily. Then Buddy blinked. The picture wasn't right. Jimmy's pants were spotted and out of press. He wore no tie. His shirt collar was frayed. Jimmy's face was thin, gaunted. His eyes had hollows under them like black smears.

"What's the matter, Buddy?" he asked. Then he knew it was the clothes. "Oh, these! Don't mind these. They're just some old rags I threw on."

He took Buddy's elbow, turned him toward the subway. No car? Gas rationing, of course, thought Buddy.

"Where you going? Don't you live up near the park any more?"

"I thought you knew I moved," said Jimmy. "I get my mail up there is all—my manager's place. But I'm back in our old neighborhood. Avenue A. And you haven't told me yet. How's Ma?"

Buddy swallowed. Jimmy used to send Ma money every week. These past couple years, he figured Jimmy was too busy providing for his own family. The burden had all been on Buddy.

"She has a little apartment," Buddy said. "She's comfortable there. And she has some friends."

JIMMY'S apartment was a fifth floor walkup, smelling sweetly of slightly soured diapers. Jimmy brought Buddy to it off a crowded slum street filled with screaming kids and the rumbling greasy shadow of an El structure overhead.

Jimmy thrust a cat out of the way and pushed into the apartment's gloom. A blonde woman in rumpled gingham came out of an adjoining room.

Jimmy boomed, "Meet the frau!"

"Shh!" protested the woman. "You'll wake the kids."

"Kids?" Buddy stared bewilderedly. "What is this? I thought you only had one."

"One and two is three. Twins," Jimmy explained. "Why didn't you write once in a while? You'd have found out."

"*Me* write!" As if he hadn't!

Buddy blinked his young blue eyes. He began to understand why Jimmy hadn't

written the past year, why he had been sending no more money. He had pride. He'd perhaps been ashamed to admit his poverty. But why? He could have written, asked how Ma was, told her about the twins.

Buddy got Jimmy aside. "What is this?" he pleaded. "What happened? What happened to all the dough you had?"

"Well, there was a restaurant, a pool hall—one thing and another. But this isn't bad here." Jimmy tried to laugh it off. "It's all right."

"You look kind of light, Jim." Buddy studied Jimmy's spare build with eyes that made Jimmy move uncomfortably.

"Yeah. 133-135. Not bad. I'm in good shape. I'll win my money back. I'm coming along. You wait and see!"

Buddy kept silent. He thought, *Jimmy looks like hell. What's happened to him?* But he kept it to himself.

Still, it was on his mind all through the dinner Jimmy's wife, Ruth Ann, served to him. And he thought of it as he lay awake, later, in bed.

Buddy got up early in the morning. He lost no time. He found a spot down near the river and put in some road work, all bundled up in sweatshirt and cap, with a towel around his neck. He weighed about 140 now. It would be a breeze for him to make 138 for his Coney Island go with Wyatt. But he wanted to be strong for it.

Three strange men were in the house when Buddy returned. Buddy stepped in the kitchen door and they shut up like freshly frozen clams. They had toothpicks between their teeth and their pants were tailored so high their neckties ended in their waistbands. They draped around the stove, the sink, the icebox.

Jimmy took Buddy into the next room, shut the door. It struck Buddy queer.

He said, "Jimmy, who are these vanilla-flavored monkeys? I don't like their looks. I don't like the way they decorate the kitchen."

"It's nothing. It's just an old business deal I gotta straighten out. Act nice. Take your shower."

Jimmy patted Buddy on the shoulder and went back through the door and closed it again. Buddy sat down on the bed, letting sweat from his run ooze through his clothes. He heard Jimmy's kids stirring in the next bedroom. But he didn't hear any talk from the kitchen. Jimmy was intentionally soft-pedaling the men.

Buddy got up. He went in the bathroom. He turned on the cold water in the shower. It made a loud beat in the tub. Jimmy would think he was showering. Buddy walked back to his own bedroom near the kitchen. He tiptoed near the door, stood there.

"The fourth or fifth round," said one of the men in the kitchen, his voice back to normal pitch. "Anywhere along in there. Just so it looks good."

"Sure, anywhere along in there," said another. "Just so it looks good. We don't want no beef."

"I'll make it look good all right," said Jimmy. "I'll make it look good."

BUDDY felt the hot sweat on him turn cold. His face and arms and legs were suddenly drained of blood. He slumped down on his bed thinking crazy thoughts. In a little while he heard the kitchen door open, then close, as the men left.

Buddy got up, shoved open the kitchen door. Jimmy jumped. "I thought you were taking your shower?"

"What in hell is this? What kind of a business deal? Jimmy, are you crazy?"

Jimmy turned away. Buddy clutched his arm. Jimmy jerked it away.

Buddy stared. "But Jimmy. You can't go in the tank for Slatterty! Think what it means! There's a Garden bid on this. You win and you're in line for a grab at the crown. What's happened? You—"

"There is no bid." Jimmy's voice was tight. "That elimination tourney is off. This is my last fight. I'll get five hundred bucks from these fellows, outside my purse, and that will make a nice little nest-egg for Ruth Ann."

"You mean you're gonna quit. You're gonna quit fighting?" Buddy blinked, incredulous. It was like seeing the sun drop out of the sky.

"I'm getting into the army," said Jim. "And I'm not taking a dive for Slatterty. I'm going in to win. But I was thinking in case I should lose, that five hundred covers me. Ruth Ann and the kids will need it. I've got to have it."

Jimmy walked out before Buddy could answer him. Didn't Jimmy realize he was playing both ends and that the gambling fraternity brooked no double-crosses, if that was what Jimmy really intended?

Buddy was still troubled by it when he went down to the gym. He went alone, for Jimmy hadn't yet begun serious work for his fight with Slatterty. Buddy was surprised to find Stillman's smaller than Los Angeles' Manhattan Gym. You looked out windows and you saw tenements and wash on lines. The gym had a lunch counter at one end, which was different, and an upstairs where there were heavy bags and mats.

He met Moe Ryan, his manager. Ryan had preceded him to New York and gotten him the Coney Island go. Ryan was a busy little man with a balloon waistline. Shiny, a chocolate-coated article, also from the Coast, acted as trainer and bucket-boy for Moe's menage. It made Buddy feel better just to see them.

Shiny made his white teeth grin. "Y'all look kinder tired, Buddy. Like y'all been hitting' the big town up hard."

"It was the bus trip," Ryan decided. "A trip like that's enough to wear the seat off an elephant."

Buddy decked out in his togs and started to work. About fifty others of the muffin-eared boys were already putting ginger in it. Buddy ended a round of rope-skipping with a cross-over turn, when he heard someone speak his name.

He turned and there was a small group standing near the side gallery. Gym fans.

Buddy said, "Did I hear somebody say Jenkins?"

"Yeah," said a dapper fellow with an after-shave look to his face. "We was just talking about that palooka Jimmy Jenkins."

"Jimmy Jenkins," said another with a a laugh. "Jimmy the peach-fuzz boy."

Buddy felt blood run hot through him.

A third fan said, "Jenkins always was a jerk. How'd they ever make a match like that? Tom Slatterty could lick him with tobacco juice. Just spit on him."

"It's ruinin' the fight game, that's what it is. But is Slatterty a fool? Is he gonna fight anybody but chop-meat when he's in line for the title?"

Buddy put in his chips then. He said, "Jimmy Jenkins is gonna take Slatterty apart. He's gonna make little pieces out of him!"

"Who, phony Jenkins?"

Buddy's bandage - wrapped hand grabbed the man who said that. "Jimmy Jenkins is my brother, see," he ground out. "And don't you be calling him names!"

The man backed away, but the fresh-shaved fellow interceded. "Look, Cap," he said, "this ain't sentiment stuff we're talkin'. We're talkin' who's going to win the Jenkins-Slatterty tangle. When you got to lay it on the line, it's something else again. It ain't no relatives or brothers enterin' into it, get it?"

"Maybe he does want to lay it on the line," said the man Buddy had grabbed. "If that's what you mean, put up or shut up. I'll put my cash on Slatterty. At one to three."

Buddy said, "I got two hundred that'll do my talking for me."

Buddy knew he didn't have the money —yet. He wouldn't have it until after his fight with Wyatt. But the fans crowding around worked it fast. They called over a hard-looking proposition named Hollis. Hollis had Buddy put his name on an I. O. U. He said it would be perfectly all right to wait a few days for the money.

Later, when it came his turn for a couple rounds of sparring, Buddy felt dizzy.

Shiny said, "Whassa matter? Y'all look kinder sick."

And Moe put in, "Maybe he better not box today. Maybe he ought to take it easy. Huh, Buddy?"

SEPTEMBER nights can get pretty cool around New York. Buddy's fight with Al Wyatt was the last outdoor card of the season. Buddy had left behind him a week of indifferent training.

He'd never been able to get started right. Moe thought it was just that Buddy had to acclimate himself. Buddy hoped Wyatt would not be too tough.

Al Wyatt bounded into the ring like a piece of spring steel. He had big shoulders, padded with muscle and rubber, and purple trunks draped on his insignificant hips. He did not appeal to Buddy's taste. Buddy did not like the way he parted his brush of black hair or the cocky way he jigged his feet while he made passes at imaginary chins and solar plexi.

When they met in the center of the ring for instructions, he winked at Buddy, as if to say, "Ham, just you hold still while I trim you up nice with cloves and pineapple."

It was a tough fight for the three brief rounds it lasted. But Buddy had too many other things on his mind to have much patience with the methodical Al Wyatt. In the third round, Buddy put all he had into his left and missed. He put the balance in his right and didn't miss.

Wyatt's guard dropped. His arms stopped their pumping like a toy that had suddenly run out. He stared glassily and Buddy's hammering right put him down.

Wyatt rolled over on his face to make himself more comfortable while the ref grew disgusted with counting and gave it up before he was halfway through.

Buddy Jenkins showered, dressed and was coming out of the box office after the payoff with two hundred dollars in his pocket. A tough-looking proposition walked up and said:

"Remember me, Jenkins? I'm Hollis." And there were two other gentlemen, one on either side of him.

Buddy knew he was a sucker, that he had been made a fool of, but he also remembered the little item of a piece of paper with his signature on it. It wasn't easy to be a sucker.

"Yeah," he said, "I remember everything."

"You want to give it to me here?" asked Hollis, "Or would you rather at a drugstore up the street?"

When Buddy finished the payoff he put his hand in his pocket and took out what he had left. It was exactly one nickel. He had that—and an idea. He used the nickel to make a phone call. He was thinking the same thought he had been thinking all evening. Somehow he had to make brother Jimmy make a fight of it against Tom Slatterty. Buddy put his handkerchief over the phone's mouthpiece, dropped his voice.

Jimmy was home. Ruth Ann had gone to stay with a sick sister and Jimmy had had to stay home with the kids.

When Buddy came out of the booth, he had to borrow a nickel to ride the B. M. T. home. He thought of the two hundred he'd given Hollis. Buddy needed that—and plenty more. He had to send it home to Los Angeles. He'd come East to make a lot of cash like that while he could. Ma would need that after the Army had taken him.

BUDDY found Jimmy all hepped up when he walked into the apartment. Jimmy was effusive about Buddy's fight; he'd heard it over the radio. And more than that, he was excited with big news.

"Listen, Buddy," Jimmy said "Twentieth Century A. C. just had me on the phone. They just made me a bid to fight in their championship tournament if I win the go against Slatterty. Buddy, do you see what that means? It's the break I've been waiting for."

He hopped around like a kid. He pumped Buddy's hand and slapped him on the back. It pained Buddy to see Jimmy put it on so thick. It stuck out so obviously that Jimmy knew the call was a phony baloney, it irritated Buddy. It made him mad with himself he hadn't done a more convincing job of it. But suddenly he realized the uselessness of it all anyway. Nothing so superficial could fix Jimmy.

"What's the use, Jim?" he said. "Let's be realistic. Don't you know when you're through? That against any real competition you'll be chop-meat?" And he said it in spite of the fact he'd hoped the phone call might needle Jimmy to go in there and make a fight of it—a real, honest fight.

"What d'yuh mean?" Jimmy coun-

tered. "I'm not kidding. This is a real offer. They called me, I tell you. I beat Slatterty and I'm right in there."

Buddy stared at him. He was going to say, "You haven't a prayer." But Jimmy's eyes were glowing. An electric faith seemed to vibrate in him. Jimmy believed in himself!

Maybe he was wrong in his judgment of Jimmy's chances. Buddy shrugged.

Buddy took one day off, then he came back to work out with Jimmy at Stillman's. It was the first time since Buddy's return to the city that he'd seen Jimmy box. The last time he'd seen him, he'd seen him through the worshipful eyes of a young brother. And Jimmy had been in his prime. But three years could put a nice nick into a man's prime.

Buddy, himself, boxed a brace of rounds with Jimmy. He had to do his best to keep him from looking bad. He understood now why Jimmy was so anxious to get out of it all and into the army. Bullets probably seemed a lot less painful than rights and lefts that flew out of nowhere to tag your schnozzo.

Buddy said to Moe, "Twenty-eight's not old for a fighter."

Manager Moe Ryan spoke quietly, patting his balloon waistline. "Fighting's like a fire in you. After a while, it dies down."

"Slatterty will butcher Jimmy," Buddy pleaded. "What can we do?" It seemed almost funny to him now that the money boys, just to play it safe, thought it necessary to make a deal with Jimmy.

Moe nodded. "There's only one thing we can do. See he's in helluve good shape. Slatterty has had twelve kayoes in a row."

Buddy saw Jimmy after the shower. Jimmy seemed eager, excited. "I spoke to the mob," he said. "I talked to 'em. I laid it right out plain. I told them I was taking Slatterty on the up-and-up."

Buddy held his breath.

Jimmy went on, "They took it easy. They said okay. For me to forget it. They're really not bad guys."

No, not bad guys, thought Buddy. They'd probably decided to let nature take its course! Why waste five hundred

bucks on something sure as day? Five hundred bucks was five hundred bucks!

IN THE days following, Jimmy didn't get any better. That fact seemed to be known to everybody but Jimmy. He was a slob in the ring. He'd be meat for the hungry lion that was Tom Slatterty. Hollis, the bookie, came around. He grinned like a cat with its whiskers dripping cream when he saw Jimmy work.

Buddy saw Jimmy talk briefly to Hollis when the workout was over. He remembered about the proposed dive Jimmy was to take. Yes, he guessed Jimmy had really told them off. It was Thursday and the fight was Friday.

But Buddy intended to ask Jimmy, just to make sure how things stood. But when Jimmy came into the locker room, he was like a limp rag. The starch had suddenly gone out of him.

"What's the matter, Jimmy? You look sick," Buddy said.

Jimmy muttered an answer and turned away. There was something terribly wrong. Buddy knew Jimmy probably wouldn't care to be cross-examined. So he didn't follow after him. Instead he waited for Jimmy to strip out of his fight togs. Jimmy would have to pass back that way on the way to the showers and he'd see him then.

But Jimmy didn't come back for a shower. When Buddy looked for him—Jimmy was gone. Hot and sweaty as he was, Jimmy had left without a shower!

It was a cold wet night. Rain pitched down. Jimmy was not home when Buddy got there. After a while the boy from the grocery downstairs came up with the message that Jim had called to say he wouldn't be home for dinner. That he wouldn't be home until late.

Buddy had borrowed ten dollars from Moe Ryan. He ate his dinner at the delicatessen. He didn't come home until he figured the kids would be sleeping and Jim would be back. But Jim still wasn't back.

Next morning a cough from the next room where Jim slept on the davenport alone, awakened Buddy. He went into Jimmy's room, stared at him lying on the davenport bed. His nose was red and drippy. His eyes were fever-bright.

Buddy looked at a chair where Jim had hung his clothes. Water had dropped from them to form a puddle on the floor. The garments were sopping!

Buddy's mouth tightened. "What in hell is this?" He stepped to the bed and put his fingers to Jimmy's head. Jimmy's forehead was as hot as a plugged-in iron.

"You got a cold," Buddy accused. "You went out and got a cold deliberately!"

Jimmy nodded. "I can't fight. I can't go in there and fight against Slatterty tonight. I can't go in there and lose your money!"

"What do you mean?"

"I saw Hollis yesterday. He told me about your plunking down two hundred bucks on me to win. Lord, what a bad smell I made even thinking of taking a dive! How can you be so loyal to me? Me, a washed-up bum!"

"Jim—"

"Nell's bells, I knew! I knew you wanted me to go in there and make a fight of it." He jerked a weary laugh. "I knew all along you'd put through that fake phone call only to make me fight. And—up until I found out about your bet—I kidded myself along. But I can't kid you out of your dough now. You see, Buddy, just after you'd hung up on that phony call, the real call came through. The winner of this Slatterty go will be in there battling for the crown. And if you'd go in there—"

"Me?"

"Yeah. You, Buddy. Slatterty's handlers wanted me in there because all they wanted was a slice of ham baloney. Slatterty has twelve straight kayoes. They want to make sure it'll be thirteen. They wanted me, but they'll be glad to take on anybody they think is a punk.

"I saw them last night. I told them I couldn't go on, but I told them about you. I played you up big. I laid it on in such a way that they'd be sure you were a plenty soft touch. I gotta see the commish this morning. I already talked to Moe. He thinks it might be rushing it a little, but he's sure you can take Slatterty. If it can be arranged—"

Buddy held onto the back of a chair, swayed. A million thoughts churned in his head. He'd never been in big time. Now here it was with a rush. He needed this dough. And he knew he had to win to fix Jimmy up with a stake for Ruth Ann. More than that, he was thinking of the same for himself. That afternoon Buddy saw Hollis, the gambler, for he wanted to make a deal with him.

THAT night Buddy sat in a dressing room at the Garden. He sat there with his shoes laced and his hands done up in mummy-bandages. Jimmy was there, too. But at the moment he was out looking up Hollis to get back Buddy's two hundred smackers, for with Jimmy out of it, that bet was naturally off. Moe was on one side of Buddy. Shiny's stove-polish complexion brightened Buddy's other side.

Buddy came into the ring and worked his kangaroo soles carefully in the rosin. The lights were on. The galleries looked a million miles away and filled with a million people.

Tom Slatterty was borne into the ring on the crest of a cheer and he was full of acrobatics and handshakes. He was a well-knit and agile fighter, smooth and noiseless motion was in his muscles. He talked to the press row, the camera boys. He made himself at home in the tiny canvas square and he had not a glance for the intruder who was only a necessary but passing phase in his rising glory. He had twelve in his string of knockouts. Buddy's scalp would be thirteenth.

Buddy said, "I don't like this guy."

They met in the center with Slatterty bunching his sorrel mitts together. The ref began, "Now you boys know the rules . . ." When that was done, they shook hands. They came out fighting.

Tom Slatterty was a thoroughly capable workman. He moved around with luxuriantly professional ease. He wanted that thirteenth knockout.

Buddy was tensed, serious, and when Slatterty's left stung him hard a second time, he realized he was too tight. He should ride with those punches. But his eyes were carefully on Slatterty's

deadly cocked right. He kept his shoulder high as a fending guard against it.

Buddy bounced a trio of lefts, circled, and hit his stride. He had to win or he was through, he knew. He got in a pair more and a right. He got in another left, and as the crowd howled, he decided this was something that needed looking into. Slatterty was wide open to that left. He shot in the left.

Slatterty's right exploded in Buddy's face! Buddy's gloved hands groped wildly. He hung on while Slatterty punished his body. The blows drove him loose. Buddy's legs were out of kilter.

Slatterty held his arms low now. He put his body behind every punch. Buddy experimented with a left and Slatterty's ringing right caught him with his mouth open. Buddy's teeth guard went winging out to the 5.50 customers.

Buddy wobbled to his stool as the bell intervened.

"Nice going," said Moe.

"Yeah. Nice going." This Slatterty was unbeatable. What was to be done?

"I mean it," said Moe. "You stood up there and gave him sass. So he won the round, which I don't even think. So what? Just take your time."

From some place he had gotten back the mouthpiece. Moe stuck it in at the warning whistle. To Buddy, the rest had hardly begun before it ended.

Slatterty came out toward him looking for trouble. His mitts were held low, disdainfully low. His right counter to the head sent a bell ringing in every cell in Buddy's brain. Buddy danced away, sniffed his nose to clear his head.

Buddy fed his left glove to Slatterty's mouth and Slatterty ate it. He ate it with relish. He ate it with relish because every time that left came he sank his own right below Buddy's heart. He came in hungrily, looking for more of the left.

Buddy hooked the left and it surprised Slatterty. He gave Buddy a look, "Oh, so the punk knows tricks!" And he made threatening gestures.

Buddy stopped a hook with an elbow, but his own right was waste motion. Slatterty's right flew and Buddy felt a little gray mouse creeping up beneath his left eye.

BUDDY'S footwork slowed. His teeth stopped a couple right hands and he felt little cuts in his mouth. He spit blood to the apron of the canvas as they clinched near the ropes. He was breathing too hard for only the second round.

Slatterty moved around on pre-war tires. He softened Buddy with rights below the heart and lefts and rights to the head. He watched Buddy carefully, analytically.

Buddy speared a left and hooked the same left. Slatterty's right exploded and Buddy woke up on the canvas. He caught the count at eight and climbed up.

He tried to hold. Slatterty shook him off. He sensed that thirteenth kayo. He batted down Buddy's guard, seeking a breakthrough. Buddy back-pedaled. Slatterty caught him a hard hook and a driven right. Slatterty pounded another right.

Buddy's upper lip split with the blow.

Moe had little to say in the corner. His fingers were very busy with surgical tacks, with cotton and collodion. He mended the lip while Shiny applied ice to the eye.

He said, "This guy's a tough monkey. Stay away from him. Rest yourself."

Buddy went out again and Slatterty promptly paid his respects with a right bomber. He played beanbag with Buddy on the ropes. He cornered him and drummed at his body. Buddy clutched Slatterty's strong arms, swung him away and escaped the trap the ropes had become for him. He clinched and his blood was red on Slatterty's sweaty shoulder.

He punched a right and a left and excitement ran strong in his veins as he saw them shake Slatterty. He thought to himself, *I hurt him. I can beat this guy. I will beat him.*

And then Slatterty's ripping right smashed in to shut his left eye completely. Buddy floundered as another right clipped him.

Moe could do nothing for the eye. It was tight. Buddy went out for the fourth,

He could not see Slatterty's right when he stood orthodox. He shifted his stance a little, drawing back his left and twisting to the right. It was the stance not of a boxer, but of a slugger.

Buddy did not move in now. He remembered Slatterty's best blows had been counters. He stood waiting for Slatterty to come in, but Slatterty did not come in. Slatterty motioned for Buddy to come in and fight. Slatterty was strictly a counter-puncher. And suddenly it clicked in Buddy's brain that most kayo artists were! If he robbed Slatterty of his chance to counter-punch—!

Buddy made no move to go in and Slatterty scowled. He made a motion with his head that said, "Well, if you won't, I will!" And he barged in!

Buddy hooked his left and slugged his right. Buddy was the hard counter-puncher now and he connected. Slatterty lost his temper. He slammed rights and lefts, rights and lefts, and Buddy weathered them by inclining his head and holding his arms as strong vertical shields along his head and body.

WHEN Slatterty's assault paled, Buddy moved in. His left bounced off Slatterty's nose and his right crashed into his jaw. Slatterty moved back and Buddy followed with driving rights and lefts, Slatterty countered and Buddy's teeth rattled. His right eye glazed as Slatterty caught him on the temple.

Slatterty's arms were held low and he was in close. Buddy threw his right. He threw his arm and his shoulder and a hundred and thirty-eight pounds with it. He shook his head, clearing it, and moved in after Slatterty.

He shook his head again as the referee slapped his arm, but still he didn't see Slatterty. The rush and roar in his head was terrific, but above it all he heard Moe yelling and pounding the canvas deck and the referee yelling at him, too.

Then he looked and saw Slatterty. Slatterty just rolling to his face on the mat!

Buddy was in a hurry to get out of the Garden. Especially after he'd been paid.

There was one little item he wanted to attend to and he hadn't been able to do it because he was too busy answering newspaper reporters' questions about his future.

He found Jimmy waiting outside. Jimmy said, "You won a great fight, kid."

Buddy wasted no time on formalities. He said, "I won for both of us. There's something I owe. Dough for your family, Jimmy. A stake for Ruth Ann and the kids so you can be free to do what you want."

But Jimmy dropped his head. He licked his lips, lips that had been stitched fine by the scars of the leather wars. He averted his eyes.

"Look, Buddy," he said. "Look, I did a bad thing. I hope you won't be mad. Me messing with something that didn't belong to me."

He dug his hand in his pocket and with it came out a roll of bills. A roll larger, Buddy thought, than he'd ever seen outside of a bank. Two thousand dollars!

"I did a bad thing," Jimmy said. "They thought you were a soft touch. It made me mad. You know what I did? You know that two hundred you asked me to get back from Hollis, the bookie, because of all bets being off? Well, they were making some nasty cracks about you. So when Hollis gave me back the dough you bet on me, I bet it on you—at 10 to 1!"

Buddy blinked his eyes. Then he couldn't help grinning to himself. He'd done worse than that himself. He hadn't the nerve to tell Jimmy. He'd bet his purse—all of it—on himself. Because he was thinking not only of Ruth Ann and the kids but of his Ma back home! His eyes were on a more distant horizon than the lightweight crown.

"You and me, too," he said to Jimmy.









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